# CITY HILIGHTS

The Truth Speaks

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IBC WORLD NEWS
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Subzero Minneapolis Protest Challenges Trump P8

Goyal Lists Major Policy and Trade Developments P9

P11 Carrick challenges Man Utd as Arsenal await, Arteta warns of lethal counters

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# US set to roll back 25% tariffs on India?

India's Russian oil imports in December dropped to their lowest in two years, lifting OPEC's share of Indian oil imports to an 11-month high, reports stated on Friday, citing trade data.

**MUMBAI**

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Friday signaled the potential removal of additional 25 per cent tariffs on India following a sharp reduction in Indian imports of Russian oil.

Trade tensions escalated in August when US President Donald Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent levy in response to India's imports of Russian crude.

"Indian purchases by their refineries of Russian oil have collapsed. So that is a success. The tariffs are still on, 25 per cent tariffs for Russian oil are still on. I would imagine there is a path to take them off," Bessent said in an interview with Politico at the World Economic Forum.

India's Russian oil imports in December dropped to their lowest in two years, lifting OPEC's share of Indian oil imports to an 11-month high, Reuters reported on Friday, citing trade data. Bessent's remarks came amid heightened pressure from Trump, who earlier warned that tariffs could increase further unless India curtails its Russian oil purchases.

## China trade deal: Trump threatens Canada with 100% tariff

**WASHINGTON**

US President Donald Trump on Saturday threatened to impose a 100% tariff on goods imported from Canada if America's northern neighbour went ahead with its trade deal with China. Trump said in a social media post that if Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney "thinks he is going to make Canada a "Drop Off Port" for China to send goods and products into the United States, he is sorely mistaken."

While Trump has waged a trade war over the past year, Canada this month negotiated a deal to lower tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles in return for lower import taxes on Canadian farm products.Trump initially had said that agreement was what Carney "should be doing and it's a good thing for him to sign a trade deal." Carney's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

His threat came amid an escalating war of words with Carney as the Republican president's push to acquire Greenland strained the NATO alliance.

## 'Iran is not afraid, Khamenei not hiding in a bunker'

**TEHRAN**

Besieged by sanctions and an increasingly belligerent US, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei is being given security, but is not hiding in a bunker, said Iran's consul general in Mumbai. As per agency reports, the Consul General of Iran in Mumbai, Saeid Reza Mosayeb Motlagh, said foreign intelligence agencies have fomented the protests in his country and that Iran and India are both trying to keep their cooperation going despite the threat of sanctions.

To a question on the US' measures in the region, including sending an aircraft carrier strike group, the diplomat declared that Iran is fully prepared.

Motlagh said Iran has been facing and resisting foreign sanctions for many years, but has also shown an ability to resist them. The internet blackout in Iran in the wake of the protests has been criticised around the world. When the consul general was asked about this, he said it was necessary because "foreign factors were fanning the unrest" using the internet, and the country also saw cyber attacks. On allegations that Khamenei is avoiding appearing in public and hiding in a bunker, the diplomat said the Supreme Leader is holding all required meetings with officials via video conferencing and other means. "We are not afraid of any foreign powers. Some people are spreading rumours. It is natural that His Eminence must have security personnel protecting him, as in any other country. However, one should not think that he is hidden in a bunker or a shelter," he asserted.

# European Commission chief Leyen lands in Delhi

**NEW DELHI**

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen kick-started her four-day visit to India to firm up a series of big-ticket initiatives to significantly expand two-way ties.

President of the European Council Antonio Costa and von der Leyen will hold summit talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on January 27 amid increasing global concerns over disruptions caused by the Trump administration's economic and security policies.

Costa will land in the national capital on Sunday. The two European Union leaders will grace the Republic Day celebrations as the chief guests on January 26.

At the summit, India and the EU are set to announce the conclusion of the much-awaited free trade agreement and firm up a strategic defence partnership pact and a framework for mobility of Indian professionals.

Union Minister Jitin Prasada welcomed von der Leyen at the airport.

"Charting the next phase of the India-EU Strategic partnership. A warm welcome to the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen @vonderleyen, on her State Visit to India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on 'X'.

"As the world's two largest democracies, India and the EU share a partnership rooted in mutual trust and shared values," he added.

The ties between India and the EU have been on an upswing in the last few years.

The EU, as a bloc, is India's largest trading partner in goods. For the financial year 2024-25, India's total trade in goods with the EU was worth about USD 136 billion, with exports around USD 76 billion and imports at USD 60 billion.

**'On the cusp of a historic trade agreement'**

Speaking earlier this week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, von der Leyen said, "We are on the cusp of a historic trade agreement (with India)." Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has described the proposed free trade agreement as "the mother of all deals", as New Delhi and Brussels look to expand market access amid tightening global trade conditions driven by US tariffs and Chinese export restrictions.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday met ambassadors from European Union member states and underlined the need for closer cooperation to "derisk the world economy" in response to unpredictable US policies.

India and the European Union have both been impacted by the trade approach of US President Donald Trump. India faces tariff rates of up to 50 per cent on certain exports to the United States, while the EU is yet to ratify a trade arrangement with Washington that has been criticised as imbalanced.

### WHO IS URSULA VON DER LEYEN?

Ursula has been holding the position of President of the European Commission since 2019. Born on October 8, 1958, in Brussels to a Turkish-German family of mixed heritage, Ursula von der Leyen is a medical doctor by profession. She has been family affairs labour minister as well as the defence minister between 2013 and 2019 in Germany.

### LEYEN'S ITINERARY

- January 24: Arrival in New Delhi
- January 25: President von der Leyen in India. Together with President of the European Council, meets S Jaishankar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of India
- January 26: President von der Leyen in India: together with President of the European Council António Costa, participates in India's 77th Republic Day Parade celebrations; meets Droupadi Murmu, President of India.
- January 27: President von der Leyen meets PM Narendra Modi, participates in the EU-India Business Forum. participates in a banquet hosted by President Murmu; meets CP Radhakrishnan, Vice President of India.
- January 27: President von der Leyen in India and President of the European Council António Costa, participates in the 16th EU-India Summit.

*'Three children escaped unhurt and have since been placed in the care of a family member'*

# Indian national among 4 killed in Georgia shooting

**GEORGIA**

An Indian national was among four people killed in a family dispute-related shooting at Lawrenceville in the US state of Georgia, the Indian mission in Atlanta said on Friday.

During the attack, three children - aged seven, 10 and 12- hid in a closet, and the eldest managed to call 911, enabling police to reach the spot within minutes. All three children escaped unhurt and have since been placed in the care of a family member. The shooting occurred around 2.30 am (local time) at a residence in the 1000 block of Brook Ivy Court in Lawrenceville city.

Officers responding to a "shots fired" call found four adults inside the home with fatal gunshot wounds.

All were pronounced dead at the scene, Gwinnett County police said.

The police identified the victims as Kumar's wife Meenu Dogra (43), and her relatives Gourav Kumar (33), Nidhi Chander (37), and Harish Chander (38). Police and local media said all four victims were of Indian origin.

The suspect, identified as Vijay Kumar (51) of Atlanta, has been charged with four counts each of aggravated assault, felony murder and malice murder, along with one count of cruelty to children in the first degree and two counts of cruelty to children in the third degree. Investigators said the dispute began at Kumar and Dogra's Atlanta home before they travelled with their 12-year-old child to the Lawrenceville residence.

The Consulate Gerenral of India in Atlanta expressed gried over the deaths.

## 'B'desh axed from T20 World Cup after refusing to travel to India'

**NEW DELHI**

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Saturday axed Bangladesh from the T20 World Cup, following their refusal to travel to India for the tournament, sources told NDTV. The global body also named Scotland as Bangladesh's replace for the showpiece event, starting February 7. Earlier this week, ICC rejected Bangladesh's request to shift their T20 World Cup matches from India to Sri Lanka, who are the co-hosts under the hybrid model. They also gave a 24-hour deadline to Bangladesh to either confirm their participation or get replaced. It is learnt that senior ICC officials, including chairman Jay Shah, were in Dubai on Friday and an email was sent late in the evening to BCB chairman Aminul Islam Bulbul, conveying the global body's decision.

*More on page 10*

**QUICK READ**

## 8, including 6 minors, held for fire at Reddy's model house

**Ballari**

Eight people, including six minors, have been arrested in connection with a model house belonging to BJP MLA G Janardhana Reddy and B Sriramulu being set on fire. The incident occurred at the G Square Layout on Belagal Road in Ballari around 10.30 pm on Friday. According to the police, the accused, who are between 18 and 32 years old, had gone to the model house to make a reel and accidentally set it on fire while smoking. The fire caused significant damage to the property, with an estimated loss of Rs 1.25 crore. The police have identified two of the accused as Sohail @ Sahil (18), a tailor, and Astam @ Suresh (32), a fancy store owner, both from Cowl Bazaar in Ballari. The other six accused are minors.

## 'OVER 70 FUGITIVES WANTED BY INDIA TRACED ABROAD'

**NEW DELHI**

Over 70 fugitives, wanted by India, were located abroad during 2024-25, according to an official report.

As many as 203 fugitives wanted by other countries were detected/located in India during the same period.

A total of 71 "wanted persons/fugitives wanted by India" were located abroad in 2024-25, according to the annual report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

The number of such wanted fugitives located abroad is the highest in the over a decade time, officials claimed.

A total of 27 fugitives/ wanted persons returned to India, from abroad in the last financial year, said the ministry's annual report for 2024-25.

It also gave details on the working of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which acts as the National Central Bureau (NCB) -- the nodal point for Interpol in India.

*More on page 6*

## 'Transfer of judges is judiciary's internal matter, govt can have no say'

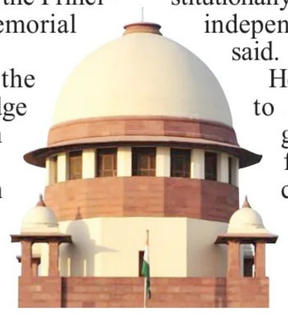
**NEW DELHI**

Supreme Court judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyan on Saturday said that the transfer of judges is an internal matter of the judiciary and that the government should have no role in the process, stressing that judicial transfers are meant solely for the better administration of justice.

Speaking at a lecture held at the ILS Law College, Pune, Justice Bhuyan said,

"Transfer of a judge is always for the better administration of justice. It is an internal matter of the judiciary. The government can have no say in that." Justice Bhuyan cautioned that any departure from this principle compromises judicial independence and defeats the purpose of insulating the judiciary from outside influence.

Justice Bhuyan was delivering a lecture on "Constitutional Morality and Democratic Governance" as part of the Principal GV Pandit Memorial Lecture series.



In his address, the Supreme Court judge expressed concern over instances where collegium resolutions themselves record that a transfer was made at the request of the government, describing this as deeply troubling. "When the collegium itself records that the transfer of a High Court judge was being made at the request of the government, it reveals a striking intrusion into what is constitutionally supposed to be an independent process," he said.

He said this amounts to an admission of governmental influence in a process that was specifically designed to be immune from such interference.

**BROKEN TRUST**

## *Laddu scam: CBI names TTD staff, ghee suppliers as prime accused*

**AMARAVATI**

A CBI special investigation team probing the Tirupati laddu ghee adulteration case has completed the probe and filed the final chargesheet in a local court, naming a few TTD employees, some ghee suppliers and others as accused.

"The chargesheet was filed in the Nellore ACB court on Friday," souces said on Saturday. Accusing several persons and ghee suppliers, the SIT's remand report had earlier observed that adulterated ghee was made by mixing ingredients such as palm oil, palm kernel oil and palmolein.

Along with minimal quality of ghee, chemicals such as beta carotene, acetic acid ester, ghee flavour and other adulterants were used to adjust lab test values and maintain aroma in the adulterated ghee, said the report.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had claimed in September 2024 that animal fat was used in preparing Tirupati laddus (consecrated sweet) during the previous YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime in the state, triggering a massive political row.

During an NDA legislative party meeting in the southern state in 2024, Naidu had alleged that the erstwhile YSRCP government did not even spare Sri Venkateswara temple and used substandard ingredients and animal fats for making laddus, which are revered and sought after by crores of devotees.

QUICK READ

## Hit-and-run: Night delivery turns fatal in Bengaluru

**Bengaluru**

A delivery boy was killed in a hit-and-run accident near Bhattarahalli signal in KR Puram early Friday morning. The victim, Surender Bahadur, aged 38, was a native of Nepal and had been living in Bengaluru for three years. He was riding his scooty for a delivery around 3.30 am when a speeding car rammed into him and fled the spot. Surender died on the spot due to severe injuries. The incident was captured on CCTV cameras. Police have registered a case and launched a search to trace the absconding driver. Authorities urged witnesses to come forward quickly.

## Parking dispute sparks clash near temple in city

**Bengaluru**

A parking dispute escalated into a brawl near Durga Parameshwari Temple in Vidyaranyapura. The clash involved Yelahanka Congress leader Keshav Rajanna's son-in-law and locals. The disagreement began when the family tried to park a newly bought BMW in front of a house next to the temple, upsetting the residents. Verbal arguments quickly turned physical, and the son-in-law's associates attacked the house owner, Srinath, and his family. Police arrested three youths from Rajanna's side, issued notices, and warned both parties. The temple priest said the commotion was unnecessary and emphasized that the temple did not provide protection to anyone.

## Search for pet ends in tragedy as train hits boy

**Bengaluru**

A 16-year-old boy died after being hit by a train near Muddalinganahalli Gate in Nelamangala taluk on Friday morning. Yogendra, a PUC student, had gone out searching for his pet dog that went missing two days earlier. Without informing his parents, he walked along the railway track when the tragic accident occurred. Yogendra was known as a talented long jump athlete and had won many school awards. Railway police reached the spot, conducted an inspection, and registered a case. A post-mortem was held, and the body was handed over to his grieving parents amid deep public sorrow.

# B'luru gears up for grant R-Day celebrations

### 2,000 e-passes have been made available online for public, who wish to attend the event, says Police Commissioner

**BENGALURU**

The Manekshaw Parade Ground is ready for the state level celebration of the 77th Republic Day on January 26.

Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh said 2,000 e-passes have been made available online for members of the public who wish to attend the event.

Addressing a press meet with civic officials, he said the programme will begin at 8:58 am, and visitors must reach the venue before 8 am to avoid delays during security checks. He added that 516 personnel will take part in the parade, while around 2,000 police staff will be deployed for security.

Contingents from the Army, Air Force, CRPF, Tamil Nadu Police and other forces will march in the parade. Scouts, Guides, NCC cadets, Seva Dal members and school students will also participate. In total, 37 groups will be part of the march past, and about 1,400 children will present two cultural programmes.

The Governor will hoist the national flag at 9 am, receive the salute and address the gathering. Traffic restrictions will be in place between 8:30 am and 10:30 am on Cubbon Road and nearby junctions. Parking will be banned on several surrounding roads to ensure smooth movement and public safety.

Officials said over 100 CCTV cameras and baggage scanners have been installed at the ground. Entry will be allowed only with valid e-passes, invitation letters and ID cards. Citizens were requested to cooperate with security staff and follow traffic advisories for a safe and smooth Republic Day celebration. Authorities urged attendees to arrive early and use public transport wherever possible to reduce congestion around the venue area during morning hours peak.

# Guv to address National Voters' Day event today

**BENGALURU**

Karnataka will observe the 16th National Voters' Day on January 25, 2026, with a state level celebration in the city.

The event will be held at Sir Puttanna Chetty Town Hall, where Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot will attend as the chief guest.

National Voters' Day is celebrated every year on January 25 to mark the foundation of the Election Commission of India, which was set up in 1950. The day focuses on the importance of voting and reminds citizens that their voice matters in a democracy.

This year's theme is "My India, My Vote – Citizen at the Heart of Indian Democracy." The programme will bring together election officials, students, and several invited guests from different fields.

**This year's theme is "My India, My Vote – Citizen at the Heart of Indian Democracy."**

A key part of the celebration will be the welcome of new voters. Young citizens who recently became eligible will be honoured, and Electoral Photo Identity Cards will be given to them. EPIC cards will also be symbolically handed to persons with disabilities, women, transgender persons, and voters from vulnerable tribal communities. All those present will take the Voters' Pledge.

The Governor will also give awards to election officers and staff for their strong work during 2025. Winners include district and additional district election officers, electoral registration officers, assistant officers, a research assistant, booth level supervisors, booth level officers, and students who excelled in a state Kannada essay contest.

Officials said the main aim of the day is to spread awareness about elections and encourage every eligible citizen to take part in the voting process. They stressed that informed voters build a stronger, fairer, and responsible democratic nation for everyone.

# Doc attempts suicide near Vidhana Soudha over 'police harassment'

**BENGALURU**

A tense scene unfolded near Vidhana Soudha on Saturday after a 38-year-old doctor allegedly consumed poison in public, claiming he was harassed by the police during an investigation.

The man was identified as Dr Nagendrappa Shirur. Police personnel on duty quickly noticed him swallowing the substance, took away the bottle, and rushed him to Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital for emergency treatment.

Hospital sources later said he is out of danger and is under close medical supervision. The incident created high drama in the high security zone and drew the attention of passersby and officials.

According to police, Dr Nagendrappa had earlier been arrested by Anekal police in connection with a protest held outside the Anekal police station. The protest was linked to the detention of right wing activist Puneeth Kerehalli.

The doctor reportedly told authorities that he had been repeatedly questioned and mentally pressured during the investigation. He claimed this treatment caused severe stress and pushed him to take the extreme step.

Police at Vidhana Soudha station registered a case and began further inquiry into the incident. Senior officers said they would look into the allegations of harassment as part of the investigation process.

Officials also urged the public not to gather at sensitive government locations and assured that security arrangements remain strong. No untoward incident was reported after the doctor was shifted to hospital.

Sources said a detailed report on the matter will be submitted after recording statements from witnesses and officials who were present at the time of the incident. Counselling support may be offered if doctors advise it during his recovery period ahead.

# Cyber centre owner arrested for public threats

**BENGALURU**

A shocking incident was reported in Kengeri after a cyber centre owner allegedly abused and threatened a woman employee in public for taking leave from work. Police arrested Syed, owner of Muskan Times Cyber Centre, following complaints from the victim and local residents.

The woman, identified as Lakshmi, had worked at the cyber centre for nearly five years. According to police, she had taken a few days of leave due to personal reasons, which reportedly angered the owner. Investigators said he held a grudge and later confronted her on a public road.

The incident occurred around 7.30 pm on January 22, when the accused allegedly stopped Lakshmi, shouted obscene words, and threatened to strip and assault her. Witnesses said the behaviour shocked passersby and caused panic in the area. Local residents intervened, questioned the accused, and warned him against harassing the woman. As the situation escalated, they informed the Kengeri police, who rushed to the spot and took Syed into custody. Police have registered a case for criminal intimidation and insulting the modesty of a woman. Officials said further probe is under way. The incident has sparked public debate on workplace harassment and the need to protect women employees from abuse, intimidation, and misuse of power nationwide.

# Chandak, Chennur elected president, vice-presidnet of ICSI

**BENGALURU**

CS Pawan G Chandak has been elected as the National president for 2026, and CS Dwarakanath Chennur as the Vice President of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI), which functions under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India.

CS Pawan G. Chandak
President, ICSI

CS Dwarakanath Chennur
Vice President, ICSI

CS Pawan G Chandak has specialized expertise in labour laws and the field of labour welfare. He possesses extensive experience in corporate law, foreign exchange law, industrial law, legal metrology, secretarial audit, arbitration matters, and in the SEZ, STPI, and DoT sectors.

He has served as an independent director and advisor to large corporate organizations and multinational companies, and has gained deep insight into the challenges and issues in his areas of expertise. He is proficient in handling corporate law matters, deal structuring, and providing advisory services on mergers and amalgamations.

CS Dwarakanath Chennur is a Fellow Member of ICSI and is a qualified professional in the insolvency domain as well as a certified social auditor. He began his professional career as a Company Secretary in 1992 and worked with various companies for nearly 10 years before starting professional practice in 2002. Currently, he provides services under the Companies Act, FEMA, RBI regulations, and SEBI regulations to listed companies in the private and public sectors, as well as subsidiaries of foreign companies. His areas of expertise include corporate laws and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

# Non-veg lovers in shock as chicken prices soars

**BENGALURU**

Chicken lovers in Bengaluru and other cities of Karnataka are facing a big shock as prices of chicken meat have risen sharply. While a kilogram of chicken cost between ₹260 and ₹280 last December, it has now crossed ₹340 to ₹350 per kg in many places. Traders estimate that prices could rise further to ₹370–₹380 in the coming days.

Experts say the price surge is due to multiple factors. Protests by poultry farmers in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh over high maintenance costs have disrupted supplies. Farmers are demanding higher payments from companies, which has reduced production. At the same time, overall chicken production has declined, creating a shortage in the market.

The price rise is expected to impact non-vegetarian restaurants as well. Popular dishes like chicken biryani, chicken kebabs, and other chicken-based meals may see cost increases in the coming weeks. Since much of Karnataka's chicken supply comes from Tamil Nadu, events outside the state are directly affecting local markets.

Traders and consumers are closely watching the situation, worried about how high prices might go. For non-veg lovers, this sudden hike comes as an unpleasant surprise, adding pressure on household budgets and food expenses. Authorities and traders are monitoring supply to try and stabilize the market in the near future.

# HC denies retirement without valid reason

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka High Court has ruled that an employee cannot seek voluntary retirement without giving a proper reason, especially when facing disciplinary action for repeated absence from duty.

A division bench of Justice Anu Sivaraman and Justice Vijayakumar A. gave the decision while dismissing an appeal filed by L. Srinivas, a former driver with the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC).

Srinivas had been removed from service for long periods of unauthorised absence. He later applied for voluntary retirement, but the court said such a request cannot be accepted if no valid explanation or supporting documents are provided.

The bench noted that despite repeated warnings, penalties and opportunities, the driver continued to remain absent without approved leave. He failed to submit medical certificates or official leave applications to justify his absence. Though he claimed health problems, he did not produce proof or formally request lighter duties under disability provisions.

The case dates back several years. Srinivas joined KSRTC in 1997 and was first dismissed in 2010 for repeated absence. The Labour Court later ordered his reinstatement with reduced benefits. However, he again stayed away from duty without permission in 2013, leading to another inquiry and dismissal in 2015.

The Labour Court later directed KSRTC to consider his voluntary retirement plea. KSRTC challenged this before the High Court, arguing that an employee facing proven misconduct cannot bypass disciplinary action through voluntary retirement.

Agreeing with this, the High Court said the Labour Court was wrong to entertain such a request. The appeal was dismissed, and the dismissal from service remains valid. The judgment reinforces that service rules must be followed strictly by employees.

KRIDOTSAVA 2026

# *Athletics build resilience, leadership: Murugendraiah*

**BENGALURU**

Athletics play a crucial role in building resilience, discipline and teamwork, said Assistant Commissioner of Police (Sampigehalli Sub-Division) Murugendraiah M.

He was speaking after inaugurating the 'Kridotsava 2026', the Annual Undergraduate Sports Meet of Kristu Jayanti (Deemed to be University)' here on Saturday.

Murugendraiah formally declared the sports meet open and lit the ceremonial torch,

drawing parallels with the ancient Greek Olympic tradition and symbolising the enduring spirit of sportsmanship.

Addressing the athletes, he lauded the students for their impressive march past and remarked on how fortunate they were to be part of such a distinguished institution, adding that he felt "at home" the moment he stepped onto the campus.

He emphasised the role of sports in fostering resilience, discipline and teamwork—values deeply embedded in the ethos of Kristu Jayanti University. He encouraged students to actively engage in athletics alongside academics to develop well-rounded personalities and strong leadership qualities.

University Vice-Chancellor Fr. Dr. Augustine George announced the results of the march past competition, in which Jayantian Vortex secured first place, followed by Jayantian Crusaders and Jayantian Spartans in second and third places respectively. In the banner competition, Jayantian Crusaders emerged winners, with Spartans and Vortex securing the second and third positions.

Fr. Dr. Augustine George, V-C; Fr. Dr. Lijo P. Thomas, Pro V-C; Fr. Jais V. Thomas, CFO; and Som Zacharia, Director – Planning and Infrastructure Development among others were present.

# 'Govt officials must accept calls from representatives'

**BENGALURU**

The Karnataka government has issued strict instructions to all officials to accept phone calls from elected representatives, including MLAs, MLCs, MPs, and Rajya Sabha members. Chief Secretary Dr Shalini Rajneesh, has emphasized that officials cannot ignore these calls and must respond promptly.

A circular issued by the Chief Secretary noted that members of the Legislative Assembly and Council often contact government officials to resolve grievances and problems raised by the public. It was observed that some officials either do not pick up calls from these representatives or fail to return them even when busy with other duties.

To address this, the circular mandates that all government officers must keep contact numbers of elected representatives readily available. If an official is occupied when a call comes in, they are required to call back as soon as possible and provide a proper response to the issues raised.

QUICK READ

## Two Injured in Cut-out Mishap at Chief Minister's Event

**HUBBALLI**

Two persons are undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Hubbali following an incident involving the collapse of a cut-out at an event attended by the Chief Minister in the city. The incident occurred at the venue where a large number of people had gathered, leading to panic and injuries to those present nearby. According to sources, the injured woman has been identified as Sharada Karakatti, a resident of Hubbali. She sustained injuries when the cut-out fell unexpectedly at the venue. Sharada had reportedly come to the programme along with her mother and son to submit a request related to allotment of a house.

## Five Arrested for Illegal Gambling Near Hulkoti

**GADAG**

In a major action against unlawful activities, the police arrested five persons for allegedly engaging in illegal gambling near Hulkoti village in Gadag district. The raid was conducted following specific information received about gambling activities being carried out clandestinely in the area, police sources said. According to officials, the incident took place on the outskirts of Hulkoti village, where a group of individuals had reportedly gathered to indulge in gambling by violating legal provisions. Acting on a tip-off, a police team conducted a surprise raid at the spot and caught the accused red-handed while they were involved in the illegal activity.

## Ancient Architectural Remains Discovered in Agricultural Land

**GADAG**

In a significant development highlighting the rich historical legacy of north Karnataka, ancient architectural remains have been discovered in an agricultural field at Lakkundi near Gadag. The discovery was made in a field garden area, creating excitement among historians, archaeologists, and local residents alike. According to local sources, the remains came to light during routine agricultural activities in the field. Farmers noticed stone structures, carved slabs, and foundation-like formations beneath the soil, prompting them to inform local authorities and history enthusiasts. Preliminary observations suggest that the structures could belong to an ancient temple complex or a historically significant settlement.

# CM Siddaramaiah Inaugurates KSDB Houses and Distributes Housing Plots

### CM inaugurated newly built KSDB houses in Hubballi and handed over housing plots to beneficiaries

**HUBBALLI**

Siddaramaiah on Saturday inaugurated newly constructed houses built by the Karnataka Slum Development Board (KSDB) and formally handed over new housing plots to beneficiaries in Hubbali. The programme marked another major step by the state government towards providing dignified housing for economically weaker sections and slum dwellers.

The Chief Minister, along with Mallikarjun Kharge, inaugurated the newly constructed housing units on Mantur Road in Hubbali. The event witnessed a large gathering of local residents, party workers, and beneficiaries who welcomed the leaders with enthusiasm.

Addressing the gathering, Siddaramaiah said that providing affordable and secure housing to the poor remains a top priority of the state government. He stated that a permanent house is not just a shelter but a symbol of dignity, safety, and social security for poor families. The Chief Minister assured that the government would continue to implement welfare schemes aimed at improving the living conditions of the underprivileged. Mallikarjun Kharge, speaking on the occasion, said that inclusive development is possible only when the basic needs of citizens, such as housing, education, and healthcare, are addressed effectively. He praised the KSDB for its role in transforming the lives of slum dwellers by providing them with permanent housing and basic amenities.

The newly inaugurated houses have been constructed with modern facilities, including proper sanitation, drinking water connections, electricity supply, and access roads. Beneficiaries expressed happiness and relief on receiving their new homes, stating that the initiative has given them a sense of stability and hope for a better future.

The event also drew attention for the warm reception received by the Chief Minister. Not only residents of Hubbali but also supporters and admirers from different parts of the country gathered and expressed their appreciation through slogans, reflecting Siddaramaiah's popularity among the masses.

Officials of the Karnataka Slum Development Board said that similar housing projects are being implemented across the state to ensure that no family is left without a safe place to live. They added that more such houses and housing plots would be distributed in the coming months under various state-sponsored schemes.

# Farmer Alleges Forgery and Misuse of Power by Revenue Officials

**KALAGHATGI**

A farmer from Ramanala village has alleged large-scale forgery by revenue officials, with the case currently under trial.

Siddappa Talwar, a farmer from Ramanala village in Kalaghatgi taluk, has alleged serious misuse of power by revenue officials, accusing them of forging documents and signatures and illegally adding the names of 26 other individuals in land-related records. The allegations have sparked concern among farmers and residents in the region, highlighting issues of transparency and accountability in revenue administration.

Addressing a press conference held at the Dastikoppa IB, Siddappa Talwar claimed that a formal complaint has already been lodged against the concerned officials, including the Revenue Inspector and the Village Accountant. He stated that the matter is currently under trial at the Kalaghatgi Court in connection with the disputed land records.

According to Talwar, the alleged irregularities involve the manipulation of official documents and the forging of signatures to unlawfully enroll additional names in the Record of Rights, Tenancy and Crops (RTC). He claimed that such actions have caused significant injustice to genuine landholders and farmers, affecting their ownership rights and livelihoods.

Talwar further alleged that a total of 28 people have been booked in connection with the case. Among those named are Parashuram Suthagatti, Umesh Bammigatti, and Annappa Lamani. He reiterated that the complaint clearly points to the misuse of official authority by forging documents, fabricating signatures, and enrolling 26 fake names in the RTC records.

Speaking to the media, Siddappa Talwar demanded strict legal action against all those involved, irrespective of their official positions. He emphasised that land records are the backbone of farmers' security and any tampering with them directly impacts the rural economy and social stability. He also urged the district administration to ensure that such incidents do not recur and that farmers are protected from administrative exploitation.

Others present at the press conference, including Devari Talwar, Hugappa Achamatti, and Yellappa Melinamani, expressed support for Siddappa Talwar and echoed his demand for justice. They stated that several farmers in the taluk have faced similar issues and fear harassment due to alleged irregularities in revenue offices.

*Women activists of the BJP staged a road protest in Hubballi, wearing black saris and raising slogans*

# BJP Stages Protest: Women Activists Sit on Roads Wearing Black Saris

**HUBBALLI**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday staged a protest in the commercial city of Hubballi, with women activists taking centre stage by sitting on the road and raising slogans against the state government. Dressed in black saris as a mark of protest, the women accused the government of failing to address key public issues and alleged misgovernance. The protest was organised at a busy location in the city, leading to temporary disruption of traffic and drawing the attention of commuters and local residents. Holding placards and banners, the demonstrators shouted slogans condemning what they described as the anti-people policies of the state government. The black attire, party leaders said, symbolised anger and disappointment over the government's functioning. Addressing the gathering, BJP women leaders alleged that the state government has neglected issues affecting women, families, and the general public. They claimed that rising prices of essential commodities, power tariff hikes, and lack of effective law and order have added to the hardship of common citizens. The leaders said women, who manage household responsibilities, are among the worst affected by inflation and economic mismanagement.

The protesters also accused the government of ignoring the concerns of traders and small business owners in Hubbali, a major commercial hub in north Karnataka. They said frequent policy changes and alleged administrative failures have adversely impacted business activity, employment, and overall economic growth in the region. Several women activists, speaking during the protest, said they were compelled to come onto the streets as their repeated appeals to the government had gone unheard. They warned that if corrective measures are not taken immediately, the BJP would intensify its agitation across the district and the state.

## Fatal Road Accident Claims One Life

**ATHANI**

A fatal road accident was reported from Darura village in Athani taluk, resulting in the death of one person and sending shockwaves through the local community. The incident underlining once again the growing concerns over road safety in rural areas.

According to preliminary information, the accident took place when the victim was travelling on the village road and met with a serious mishap under circumstances that are still being investigated. The impact of the accident was severe, and the victim sustained critical injuries. Locals who rushed to the spot immediately alerted emergency services and attempted to provide first aid. The injured person was shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment. However, despite the efforts of doctors, the victim succumbed to injuries due to the severity of the impact. The deceased has been identified as a resident of Darura village, and his sudden death has left family members and villagers in deep grief.

Upon receiving information, police from the Athani police station visited the spot and conducted a preliminary investigation. The body was sent for post-mortem examination to ascertain the exact cause of death. A case has been registered in connection with the accident, and further investigation is underway to determine whether overspeeding, negligence, or road conditions contributed to the incident. Local residents have raised concerns over the condition of roads in and around Darura village. They said that poor road maintenance, lack of proper signage, and inadequate lighting during night hours often lead to accidents. Villagers demanded that the authorities take immediate steps to improve road safety and prevent such tragic incidents in the future.

The death has cast a pall of gloom over Darura village, with people gathering at the victim's house to console the bereaved family. Community members described the deceased as a well-known and hardworking individual, and expressed shock over the untimely loss.

## Padayatra Led by Pranavananda Swamiji Reaches Budagumpa Village

**KOPPAL**

A padayatra being led by Pranavananda Swamiji demanding the fulfilment of various long-pending demands of the Ediga community has reached Budagumpa. The march has been receiving widespread support from members of the community and local residents in the villages it passes through. The padayatra, which began earlier from another part of the district, aims to draw the attention of the government to the socio-economic issues faced by the Ediga community. Swamiji and his supporters have been walking village to village, spreading awareness about the community's demands and urging authorities to take immediate and concrete action. Addressing the gathering at Budagumpa village, Pranavananda Swamiji said that the padayatra is not a political movement but a peaceful and democratic effort to secure justice and equal opportunities for the Ediga community. He stated that despite repeated representations, many genuine demands related to education, employment, and social welfare have remained unaddressed for years.

## Hindu Sammelana Held Meaningfully: Shobha Yatra Flagged Off

**KOPPAL**

The Hindu Sammelana organised at Huligi village in Koppal district was held in a highly meaningful and disciplined manner, reflecting cultural pride, spiritual values, and social unity. The highlight of the programme was the grand Shobha Yatra, which was ceremoniously flagged off, marking the formal beginning of the Sammelana celebrations.

The event witnessed the participation of a large number of devotees, religious leaders, youth, women, and villagers from Huligi and surrounding areas. The Shobha Yatra passed through the main streets of the village amid devotional chants, traditional music, and cultural performances. Participants carried saffron flags and placards displaying messages of harmony, cultural heritage, and social responsibility.

Religious heads and organisers addressing the gathering said that the Hindu Sammelana was organised with the objective of strengthening cultural awareness and promoting values such as unity, mutual respect, and service to society. They emphasised that such gatherings are not merely religious events but platforms to reflect on social issues and inspire people to lead disciplined and ethical lives. The procession was accompanied by traditional folk art forms, including drum beats and devotional songs, which added colour and vibrancy to the event. Villagers enthusiastically welcomed the Shobha Yatra by offering flowers and lighting lamps along the route, creating a festive and devotional atmosphere throughout Huligi.

Speaking on the occasion, speakers highlighted the historical and spiritual significance of Huligi, stating that the village has long been a centre of faith and culture. They urged the younger generation to remain connected to their roots while also contributing positively to society through education, hard work, and social service.

The Sammelana also included discourses on cultural values, social harmony, and national unity. Speakers stressed that Hindu philosophy teaches inclusiveness and peaceful coexistence, and called upon people to uphold these ideals in everyday life. Emphasis was also laid on maintaining social harmony and respecting diversity while preserving cultural traditions. Volunteers played a key role in ensuring the smooth conduct of the programme.

GADAG VOTERS DAY

# *National Voters' Day Celebrated with Awareness Programmes*

**GADAG**

National Voters' Day was celebrated in the city with enthusiasm and a strong message on the importance of voting in a democratic system. The programme was organised under the guidance of the district administration and the Election Department to create awareness among citizens, especially first-time voters, about their rights and responsibilities.

The event was held at prominent venues across the city, including government offices and educational institutions, with the participation of officials, students, teachers, and members of the public. Officials explained the significance of January 25, which marks the foundation day of the Election Commission of India, and highlighted the role of voters in strengthening democracy. Addressing the gathering, district officials said that voting is not only a constitutional right but also a fundamental duty of every citizen. They urged people to actively participate in elections and choose their representatives responsibly. Special emphasis was laid on ethical voting, free from inducements and undue influence.

As part of the celebrations, a voter's pledge was administered, in which participants committed themselves to uphold democratic values, vote fearlessly, and contribute to free and fair elections. The pledge ceremony saw active participation from students and newly enrolled voters, who expressed pride in being part of the democratic process. Various awareness activities were organised to mark the occasion. These included essay writing competitions, quiz programmes, poster exhibitions, and speeches focusing on the importance of voting. Officials said such activities help instil democratic values among the younger generation and encourage them to become informed and responsible voters.

Speaking on the occasion, representatives from the Election Department highlighted the efforts made to ensure inclusive elections, including special facilities for senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and vulnerable sections of society. They also encouraged citizens to verify their names in the electoral rolls and report any discrepancies well in advance of elections.

In Gadag, students from schools and colleges played a key role in the celebrations. Many of them said the programme motivated them to understand the electoral system better and inspired them to participate actively once they become eligible voters.

## QUICK READ

### Short circuit sparks fire, home appliances destroyed

**CHAMARAJANAGAR**

A house in Bandalli village, Hanur taluk, caught fire on Saturday morning due to a short circuit. The blaze destroyed most of the household appliances in the home belonging to Jayalakshmi. Neighbors rushed to help and tried to control the fire, but the flames were too intense, causing extensive damage to the house. Fortunately, the family's 8-month-old baby escaped unharmed. Authorities are investigating the incident and have advised residents to check electrical wiring regularly to prevent such accidents. The community has come together to support the family as they recover from the loss caused by the fire.

### Fake FB account targets Chamarajanagar officials

**CHAMARAJANAGAR**

The district administration has warned the public about a fake Facebook account impersonating Deputy Commissioner Shriroopa, B.A.S.E. The fraudulent account, under the name "Ias Shree Roopa," is spreading lures that could harm the DC's reputation and create public confusion. Authorities clarified that the account has no connection with the District Commissioner or administration. Citizens are urged to stay alert, avoid engaging with such accounts, and report them immediately. District Magistrate Srirup emphasized informing local police or district officials if any suspicious social media activity is noticed, highlighting the importance of preventing misinformation and protecting public trust.

### Leopards spotted on busy Chamarajanagar highway

**CHAMARAJANAGAR**

A pair of leopards were seen on the interstate highway connecting Chamarajanagar, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu Friday night, raising concerns among locals. The animals were spotted near Chikkarangashetti Doddi around 9.30 pm, close to the Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Tiger Reserve. Villagers and motorists expressed fear as leopards have increasingly appeared near the roadside, creating safety risks. Authorities have urged people to stay alert and avoid traveling at night in the area. Wildlife officials are reportedly monitoring the situation to prevent accidents and ensure the leopards are safely guided back to the forest, calming public anxiety.

# HDK terms 'Go Back Governor' campaign in K'taka as drama

The state government is trying to divert attention from its failures by creating unnecessary confrontation with the Governor, says the Union Minister

**MANDYA**

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy dismissed the Congress party's "Go Back Governor" campaign as mere political drama, saying it would not solve the real problems of Karnataka.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the Maramma Devi temple in Shivalli village of Melukote constituency, he alleged that the state government was trying to divert attention from its failures by creating unnecessary confrontation with the Governor.

> Development issues must be discussed in the Assembly and it should not be turned into a political theatre.
> —HD Kumaraswamy,Union Minister

He said disputes between the state and the Centre should be resolved through discussion, not slogans or street protests. "Development issues must be discussed in the Assembly and it should not be turned into a political theatre," he said. Kumaraswamy also spoke about his political future, stating that Karnataka remains his main political ground and he would contest from wherever people want him to.

Responding to critics who claimed the Janata Dal Secular was weakening, he said the party was steadily rebuilding its strength at the grassroots level.

He added that development of Mandya district was his priority and said he had written to the Chief Minister seeking land to set up an Automotive Research Association of India centre in the region.

On possible alliances, Kumaraswamy said the JD(S) and BJP would take decisions based on people's expectations in upcoming local body elections. He admitted that local level competition between workers was natural, but final decisions would be taken after discussions within the party.

He urged leaders across parties to focus on governance, farmer welfare, jobs, and infrastructure instead of constant political fights. Stable administration, he said, would bring better results for the state's people in the long run, while political drama only creates confusion and delays progress.

# Flower-Fruit fair creates a world of joy, hope: BSY

**SHIVAMOGGA**

Former Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa said the ongoing Phala Pushpa Mela and handicrafts festival in Shivamogga has created "a new world" that brings joy and hope to visitors.

Speaking to reporters at Allama Prabhu Prem Park, where the four-day fair is being held, he said the hard work of farmers, support from scientists and efforts of self-help groups have come together in a colourful display of flowers, fruits and plants.

"When we see the flowers blooming here, our dreams also bloom," Yeddyurappa said. He added that planting even one sapling can nurture life and make the future sweeter, just like fruits. He called upon people to visit the exhibition and support farmers and artisans.

The event includes the 63rd Phala Pushpa exhibition along with an upland handicrafts festival and millet fair. Various government departments including horticulture and agriculture have joined hands to organise the programme.

Stalls at the fair display a wide range of handicrafts, sarees from different parts of India, bamboo products, traditional jewellery and handloom items. Visitors can also see different types of flowering plants, fruit varieties and horticulture crops. Models of famous landmarks such as Jog Falls and Shivappa Nayaka Fort are also part of the exhibition.

Food stalls offering millet-based dishes and local snacks have become a major attraction. Organisers said the response from the public has been very encouraging, with large crowds visiting since the opening day.

Minister Madhu Bangarappa is expected to officially inaugurate the event. Several officials, association leaders and public representatives were present during the programme. Organisers said the fair aims to promote sustainable farming, local crafts and awareness about healthy food habits among people.

# Kalladka College hosts NEET, CET guidance workshop

**KALLADKA**

Anugraha Women's College in Kalladka hosted an informative workshop on free NEET and CET crash courses, aimed at helping first and second-year PUC science students prepare for competitive exams. The program was organized in partnership with MEIF and Yenepoya College.

Sinan Zakaria, Principal and Director of Yenepoya Pre-University College and resource person from YCAL Bahrain, led the session.

He shared detailed guidance on NEET and CET exams and explained how students could benefit from the free crash courses, including the process for seat allocation. Students had the opportunity to clarify their doubts and receive practical advice on exam preparation.

The program was attended by Principal Dr. Hemalatha B. D., Treasurer Haider Ali, and other teaching and non-teaching staff, who actively supported the initiative. Students appreciated the session, calling it helpful in planning their study schedules and understanding exam strategies.

The event began with a Qirat recitation by Nuha Maryam, a first-year PUC PCMB student. Kavita Kumari K., a Science Department lecturer, welcomed the guests, hosted the program, and delivered the vote of thanks.

The workshop was described as highly beneficial, providing students with clear guidance and boosting their confidence to prepare for NEET and CET exams efficiently. It also strengthened the collaboration between local colleges and educational organizations for student development.

# Speaker Khader lays foundation for new bridge

**KONAJE**

Assembly Speaker UT Khader laid the foundation stone for a new bridge at Renjadi in Belma village, saying the project will improve connectivity and support future development in the area.

Addressing villagers after the ceremony, Khader said the existing bridge had become weak after many years and needed urgent replacement. He recalled that when his father, U.T. Farid, was an MLA, a bridge was first built at the spot to connect the island-like region with nearby areas.

The new bridge will be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹1.5 crore under the Belma Gram Panchayat. Khader said the structure should be strong and modern to meet growing traffic and future needs. He also stressed that development works succeed only when local people cooperate with officials and contractors. Religious and community leaders were present at the event. Tajuddin Raza Amjadi, khateeb of the local mosque, offered prayers for the success of the project.

Several public representatives and local leaders attended the programme, including MUDA President Sadashiva Ullal, Belma Gram Panchayat Vice President Hemavati, and Gero Development Corporation President Mamata D.S. Gatti. Ullal Block Congress President Ramesh Shetty Boliyar and former president Yusuf were also present.

Panchayat members Sattar, Yusuf, Ibrahim, Hanif, Iqbal and Razak, along with temple and mosque representatives, joined the gathering. Contractor Mohammed Sarfraz Shalimar and other officials were also in attendance.

Villagers expressed hope that the new bridge would make travel safer, especially during the rainy season, and help students, farmers and daily commuters. Work on the bridge is expected to begin soon after technical approvals.

# BJP seeks action over Guv disrespect claims

**MANGALURU**

The BJP has demanded action against Legislative Council members B.K. Hariprasad and S. Ravi, alleging they showed disrespect to the Governor during the joint session of the State Legislature.

Speaking at a press conference at the BJP district office in Mangaluru, Council member Pratapsimha Nayak said the Governor, as a constitutional authority, must be treated with full respect inside the House. He said it is standard practice for the Governor to read only the opening and closing parts of the address, which is considered valid under parliamentary procedure.

Nayak alleged that the two members created unnecessary drama by trying to obstruct the Governor. He further claimed there was physical jostling during the incident and called for a proper inquiry into what happened. He urged the Speaker to take strict action and ensure such incidents are not repeated. According to him, the BJP has already filed a formal complaint with the Speaker regarding the conduct of the two members. He said the matter had been referred to the House Committee, and requested that it should not be withdrawn or reconsidered without due process.

Nayak also accused the ruling party of trying to divert public attention from governance issues by creating controversies inside the Assembly. He claimed opposition members were not being given enough opportunity to speak during the session. Other BJP leaders present at the press meet supported the demand for an inquiry and disciplinary action. There was no immediate response from the leaders named in the allegations. Officials said any decision on the matter would depend on the findings of the House committee and the Speaker's ruling, following established legislative procedures and rules.

# RBI rules differ from cooperative act: Rajendra

**MANGALURU**

M.N. Rajendra Kumar, President of the Dakshina Kannada District Central Cooperative Bank, said cooperative institutions must clearly understand the difference between the Cooperative Act and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regulations.

He spoke at a state-level performance training programme held for presidents, directors and senior officers of town cooperative banks from the Mysuru division. The event took place at the District Central Cooperative Bank auditorium in Mangaluru. Rajendra Kumar explained that though cooperative societies are registered under the Cooperative Act, they must also follow RBI rules, especially in matters related to loans and financial operations. He said some RBI guidelines are difficult for cooperatives to follow and may clash with provisions under the Cooperative Act. Because of this, he stressed the need to consult legal experts and take suitable steps.

He gave examples such as restrictions on renting extra space in cooperative buildings and challenges faced while recovering loans from defaulters. He said such issues require legal clarity and policy discussion.

Rajendra Kumar also spoke about the difference between cooperative banks and commercial banks. He said cooperative institutions work with members' savings and focus on helping genuine borrowers, while commercial banks often deal with large corporate loans that sometimes turn into bad debts. Karnataka State Cooperative Federation Director Jayakar Shetty praised the performance of the local cooperative bank and said its model could guide other institutions. Deputy Registrar H.N. Ramesh highlighted the need for proper documents and clear property details during loan recovery auctions.

Several officials and directors from cooperative institutions attended the programme. Rajendra Kumar, who recently received a leadership award from a university in the United States, was also honoured during the event. Organisers said the training aimed to improve governance, legal awareness, and financial discipline in the cooperative sector.

# Special school staff plan statewide stir on January 28

**UDUPI**

Teachers and non-teaching staff from special schools across Karnataka will hold a state-level strike in Bengaluru on January 28, demanding better pay and timely grants.

The protest will take place at Freedom Park, according to Dr. Kanti Harish, President of the Karnataka State Special Teachers and Non-Teachers Association.

Speaking at a press conference in Udupi, she said around 180 special schools that receive support under the Child-Centered Scheme will join the protest. The strike is being organised by the state association along with the Udupi district unit.

The main demands include equal pay for equal work and the same benefits given to staff working in schools under older grant systems. The association also wants the government to immediately approve a proposal to increase financial grants to special schools by 40%.

Dr. Harish said the Supreme Court has directed that special teachers should receive full financial support, but this has not been properly implemented. She also called for guidelines of the Child-Centered Scheme to be reviewed every five years with the help of experts from special schools.

**RURAL LIFE**

# AMRIT MAHAL BULL AUCTION SETS NEW PRICE RECORD

**CHIKKAMAGALURU**

The annual Amritmahal cattle auction held at Birur in Kadur taluk created history this year, with record bids and strong farmer participation over two days.

Officials said total collections from the sale of bulls and calves touched ₹1.02 crore, the highest ever recorded at the centre.

The highlight of the event was the sale of a prized Masani seed bull, tagged B-18-39 from Basur Kaval, which was bought for ₹2.32 lakh by Ravikumar from Kappanahalli in Shivamogga taluk. It became the costliest bull sold in this year's auction.

A total of 170 bull calves, eight seed bulls and three mature bulls were brought for auction from different Amritmahal breeding centres. Farmers from Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga, Davangere, Hassan, Mysuru, Haveri and nearby districts took part with great interest.

> The sale of bulls and calves touched ₹1.02 crore, the highest ever recorded at the centre.

In another major bid, farmer Veerendra Patil from Hosur in Shikaripura bought a pair of bull calves for ₹2,07,500, emerging as the highest bidder in the calf category. He was honoured with a trophy by Vinod Priya, Secretary of the Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department.

Other farmers also made big purchases, with several pairs selling above ₹1.5 lakh. Auction officials said strict rules were followed. Bidders paid a ₹20,000 token to take part, and full payment had to be completed within 24 hours.

The Amritmahal breed, known since the time of the Mysore Maharajas, is famous for strength and suitability for farm work. Many farmers said they have trusted this breed for years for agriculture, festivals and traditional bullock cart races. Officials said the smooth conduct of the auction reflected growing awareness among breeders about conserving and promoting native cattle breeds.

## QUICK READ

### Contractors' arrogance sparks anger over roads

**CHALLAKERE**

Villagers in Manu Mainhatti, Mahadevpur panchayat, expressed outrage over the poor quality of CC road construction on Saturday. The village head, Kumaraswamy, said government orders had been sent to engineers and contractors to ensure proper work, but officials responded carelessly. Witnesses reported the engineers and workers told locals, "Don't talk too much," when asked about the shoddy construction. This dismissive attitude has deepened frustration among residents, who rely on the road daily. Authorities have been urged to monitor the project closely, address negligence, and ensure the roads meet quality standards to prevent further conflict and dissatisfaction.

### Youth leaps to death under moving bus in Kunigal

**TUMAKURU**

In a shocking incident near Agrahara in Kunigal town, local youth Thimmegowda ended his life by dashing in front of a speeding KSRTC bus late Friday night around 12:40 am. Police say family disputes drove the desperate act. CCTV footage captured the heartbreaking moment: Thimmegowda suddenly rushed toward the moving bus, crawled underneath, and was crushed under its wheels, dying instantly as it ran over his head. The tragedy stunned onlookers and halted traffic briefly. Heartbroken locals mourn the young man's rash choice amid personal strife. Kunigal police rushed to the scene, documented evidence, and launched an investigation into the circumstances.

### Chitradurga officers win state election excellence award

**CHITRADURGA**

Two district officers have brought pride to Chitradurga after receiving the State Level Best Election Practices Award for 2025–26. The honour was announced for their strong and honest work during the election process. Additional District Collector B T Kumaraswamy was chosen in the category of Additional District Election Officer. Officials praised him for carefully carrying out Election Commission programs, especially the revision of the electoral roll, which helped ensure accurate voter records. Another award went to Ambika N, a graduate primary teacher from Upparahatti Government Senior Primary School in the Challakere Assembly Constituency. She served as a Booth Level Officer and showed great dedication in managing voter related duties. Her work during voter list revision and public awareness activities earned special appreciation from the Commission. Both awardees are known for being approachable and committed to fair elections. Their efforts helped voters feel confident and informed during the process. The award ceremony will be held on January 25 at 9.30 am as part of the 16th National Voters' Day celebrations. The event will take place at Sir Puttanna Chetty Town Hall in Bengaluru, where officials from across the state will gather to honour best election practices with pride and public trust.

# GP promises quick solutions to children's issues

## PDO says protecting children's rights is the top priority of the local body

**CHITRADURGA**

Officials at Madakaripura Gram Panchayat have promised to address problems faced by children at the village level without delay.

The assurance came during a Children's Gram Sabha held at the Government Senior Primary School in Madakaripura village.

G. Nagaraj, Panchayat Development Officer, said protecting children's rights is the top priority of the local body. He assured students that their complaints would be heard carefully and solutions provided as early as possible.

Children's Gram Sabhas are conducted every year between November 14 and January 24 under the direction of the Rural Development Department. These meetings are meant only for children and give them a safe space to speak about issues related to education, health and personal safety. During the event, students from different schools under the panchayat raised concerns about school facilities and basic needs. Officials and elected representatives listened to their views.

PSI Geetha spoke about child protection laws and the importance of safety. District Child Labour Project Society Director P. Satish Kumar explained the harmful effects of child labour and urged children to focus on education. Renuka from the Child Protection Unit and Mahantesh from Don Bosco also created awareness about children's rights.

Gram Panchayat Chairperson H.S. Bhavya, Vice President Jyoti Devendrappa and several members of the panchayat attended the meeting. Teachers, Anganwadi workers and ASHA health workers were also present.

Officials said such meetings help build confidence among children and ensure their voices are heard in local decision-making. They added that strong community support is essential for creating a safe and healthy environment where every child can learn, grow and achieve dreams.

# District job fair opens doors for youth

**CHITRADURGA**

The district administration has announced a district level job fair to be held on February 1, 2026, at Government Art College in Chitradurga city. The event will begin at 9.30 am and aims to connect young job seekers with leading companies from across Karnataka.

The job fair is jointly organised by the District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, and the Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Department. Support is also being provided by the National Rural Livelihood Mission Sanjeevini and the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Rural Skill Scheme.

Many reputed companies are expected to take part and offer jobs in different sectors. Candidates who have completed SSLC, PUC, ITI, Diploma, BE, or any degree are eligible to attend. Men, women, and persons with disabilities between 18 and 35 years of age can participate.

Registration is mandatory for all candidates. Interested applicants must carry at least five copies of their biodata along with a xerox copy of their Aadhaar card. The job fair is completely free of cost. Registration must be done through the QR code provided by the organisers.

For further details, candidates may contact the NRLM unit at the Zilla Panchayat or the NRLM division at their respective Taluk Panchayat offices. Officials urged youth to attend early and prepare documents.

# Threat to Commissioner: Cops intensify hunt for accused

**CHIKKABALLAPUR**

Police in Chikkaballapur district have stepped up efforts to trace Rajeev Gowda, who is accused of threatening the Municipal Commissioner of Shidlaghatta. Officers said he has been out of reach for the past ten days as teams continue searches at multiple locations.

Police conducted a search at a house in Sanjay Nagar in Bengaluru after obtaining a court warrant. However, the accused was not found there, officials said. Police are also monitoring his travel documents to ensure he does not leave the country. A court is expected to decide on his anticipatory bail plea soon, and officers said they will act based on the order.

The case relates to an alleged threat made against Shidlaghatta Municipal Commissioner Amrutha Gowda. In addition, a letter warning of a possible attack was reportedly received at the municipal office.

Police said the letter mentioned serious threats and is now part of the inquiry.

An NCR has been registered, and police plan to file a formal FIR after completing legal procedures. As a precaution, security has been increased near the municipal office and the commissioner's residence. Patrol teams are keeping watch in the area to prevent any untoward incident.

Senior officers said the investigation is ongoing and all angles are being examined. They appealed to the public not to spread rumours and to share any useful information with the police immediately. Authorities said strict action will be taken against anyone found guilty under the law. Officials also said coordination with Bengaluru police continues as search teams track leads from phone records, associates, and recent movements linked to the suspect across districts nearby.

# 'Onus on everyone to safeguard children's rights'

**BIDAR**

"Ensuring a bright future for children is a shared responsibility," said Shasidhara Kosambe, chairman of the Karnataka State Child Rights Protection Commission, during a district-level workshop held at Pattadeva Rangamadir in Bidar.

He highlighted that despite several laws protecting children, cases of harassment, assault, exploitation, and oppression continue. "Protecting children's rights is not only the duty of the government or officers but of every citizen," he emphasized. The program, organized jointly by the Karnataka State Child Rights Protection Commission, Child Protection Directorate, District Administration, Zilla Panchayat, Women and Child Development Department, and the District Child Protection Unit, focused on "common children's problems" at district, taluk, and Gram Panchayat levels.

Kosambe pointed out that 12 POCSO cases are registered daily in the state, with over 16,000 cases in the last five years, often leading to minimal punishment. He also raised concerns about social media blackmail, minors being exploited in schools and hostels, and teen pregnancies.

Zilla Panchayat Deputy Secretary Sharanappa Katteppagol said that in today's fast-paced society, children often forget their responsibilities, and adults must act responsibly to safeguard their future. Child Welfare Committee Chairman Seemappa added that protecting every child's rights must be treated as a priority by all.

UNICEF Child Protection Project Regional Coordinator Dr. K. Raghavendra Bhatt provided detailed information on laws for child protection. As part of the program, the voter's oath for January 25 was administered.

# Thousands gather to honour Shivakumara Swamiji's legacy

**BHALKI**

Bhalki witnessed the 7th Punyasmarana of Dr. Shivakumar Swamiji, a ceremony celebrating his lifelong dedication to service and education. Organized by the Siddhganga Alumni and the Benevolent Society Bhalki, the event highlighted Swamiji's commitment to the Dasoha principle—providing food, shelter, and support to the needy.

Speaking at the program, Niranjan Swamiji of Hiremath Sansthan praised Dr. Shivakumar Swamiji as a role model for the nation. He noted that Swamiji served over 10,000 devotees during his lifetime, offering free meals, educational support, and care for underprivileged students. The speaker emphasized that the Kayaka Dasoha principle, preached by Basavanna and embraced by Siddhganga Math, continues to guide society in uplifting the poor and vulnerable. The event was attended by notable spiritual leaders, including Basavalinga Swamiji and Shivbasava Swamiji. Local dignitaries and alumni such as Shivkumar Patil, District President of Siddhganga Alumni Association, Chandrasekhara Banale, and Urban Unit Chairman Santosh BG Patil were also present. Hundreds of community members, devotees, and students participated, paying tribute to Swamiji's service and teachings. Speakers highlighted how Swamiji's educational and philanthropic work has enlightened the lives of thousands of students, many of whom now serve in high positions across society. Chandrasekhara Banale said, "Shivakumar Swamiji is the light of millions of families, guiding with knowledge and compassion."

# Sharan Sangam highlights devotion, life lessons

**BIDAR**

The monthly Sharan Sangam program was held at Basavagiri in Bidar, organized by the Lingayat Maha Math. Niranjan Swamiji of the Himalayan Dhyana Yoga Center led the spiritual discourse, sharing insights on meditation, surrender, and daily karma as essential elements for a balanced life. He emphasized that personal happiness should be guided by spiritual values rather than material wealth, and that devotion and disciplined living bring true fulfillment.

The program highlighted the teachings of Sharanas from the twelfth century, who broke caste and gender barriers while promoting equality and moral guidance through Vachana literature. Swamiji said these messages continue to serve as a guiding light for humanity, and participants were encouraged to incorporate these principles into daily life.

# Netaji Jayanti celebrated with patriotic spirit in Bidar

**BIDAR**

The 129th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was celebrated at Sri Chaitanya Graduate School in Venus City, Bidar, with a special program organized by the local youth and Graminabhivruddhi Samiti. The event aimed to instill patriotism, discipline, and the spirit of selfless service among young people, highlighting the enduring relevance of Netaji's ideals in today's society.

Senior journalist Shekanta Shemla inaugurated the program and addressed students and attendees, emphasizing the importance of following Netaji's vision for a motivated, strong, and united nation. He said that while the country has achieved independence, the younger generation must carry forward the principles of dedication, courage, and nationalism exemplified by Netaji. He urged students to apply his philosophy in everyday life and awaken to their responsibilities as citizens.

The program featured an essay competition on the life and contributions of Netaji, with over 100 students participating. Top performers were recognized, with first, second, and third prizes awarded to students for their outstanding work. Principal Abhishaka Kulkarni presided over the event, while narrators Prothachai Khedakar and Avni Ruddy guided the proceedings.

## TOURISM IN MIND

# 'Alamati Silver Lake boating to boost tourism'

**VIJAYAPURA**

Minister for Textiles, Sugarcane Development, Sugar and Agriculture, Sivananda Patil, inaugurated boating activities at Alamati Silver Lake, a major tourist destination in North Karnataka.

The launch, held on Saturday, aims to promote tourism and provide recreational opportunities for visitors and local families.

The initiative, organized by the Krishna Bhagya Water Corporation under the Water Resources Department, offers a variety of attractions, including pedal boats, motorboats, rafting, kayaking, ziplining, and other water sports, set to begin in February. Minister Patil emphasized that these activities will benefit people across Karnataka and attract tourists from neighboring states such as Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Alamati Silver Lake, created on an artificial lake built in 2003–04, is 10 feet deep and features five Japanese-style gazebos along its banks. The lake reflects the surrounding nature, earning it the name "Silver Lake." The reservoir area also includes major parks such as Rock Park, 77 Acre Park, Lavakush Park, and Krishna Park, making it a vibrant hub for leisure and family outings.

The Minister highlighted that the development of Silver Lake and the surrounding recreational facilities will strengthen tourism in the region and provide a safe, attractive environment for visitors. Former Minister S.R. Patil and officials from KBJNL, including Superintendent Engineer Basavaraj, were present during the launch.

The boating and water-sport activities are expected to draw around 7–8 lakh tourists annually, enhancing Alamati's position as a key North Karnataka tourist destination.

CH CLASSIFIEDS
To place a classified ad contact: 080-41209042

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**I, JAMES. S** Resident of No. 126, 27th Cross, OB Lay-out, St.Thomas Town, Bengaluru North, Bengaluru - 560084. Have changed my son's name from **SAM WINCHESTER JAMES To SAMUEL JAMES,** vide affidavit dated 06/01/2026, before **S.R. RAVI KUMAR, Advocate and Notary Public,** Bengaluru.

**NAME CHANGE**

I, **MUSTAFA KABIR AHAMED**, S/o. Muneer Ahmed, residing at No. 107, 2nd Cross, Amar Layout, A.C. Post, Bengaluru-560045, have changed my name to **KABIR AHMED,** vide affidavit dated: 20.01.2026, before Notary N.NAGAPPA, Bangalore.

**IN THE COURT OF THE II ADDITIONAL CIVIL JUDGE & J.M.F.C AT DODDABALLAPUR**
**C. Mis. No. 1220/2025**
**Sri. MOHAMMED ZAKIR,** Aged about S/o. Late. Mohammed Zikriya R/at, # 2435, Rojipur, Doddaballapur Town, 33 years, Bengaluru Rural Dist-561203. V/s
**PETITIONER. The Registrar Birth & Death, CMC Doddaballapur. -RESPONDENT.**
**PAPER DRAFT PUBLICATION**
Whereas, the petitioner has filed the above petitioner under section 13(3) & 14 of birth and death Act rules 1969, directing the respondent to issue the death Certificate of petitioner's Grand mother KHURSHIDUNNISA, W/o. Late. MOHAMMED JIYAULLA, who was reportedly died on 16-09-2015, at his residency at, Doddaballapur Town, Bengaluru Rural District.
Hence you are hereby summoned to appear before this court either in person or through an advocate duly instructed on your behalf on 10.03.2026 at 11 A.M. to answer or oppose the case thereto.
Take notice, if you fail to appear on the above said date and time, the case will be heard and decided ex-party.
Given under my hand and the seal of the court on 24.01.2026
**By the order of the court**
**Chief Ministeral Officer, II Additional Civil Judge & JMFC JMFC Doddaballapur**
Advocate for Petitioner: **ABDUL MUJEEB,**
Doddaballapur,
Date: 20-01-2026.

**IN THE COURT OF THE ADDITIONAL CIVIL JUDGE & JMFC AT DODDABALLAPUR**
**C.misc.No. 1246/2025**
**PETITIONER: Smt. Venkatalakshmamma** W/o Late Ramaswamy Aged about 80 years, R/at Kallukote Village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk, Bengalore Rural District. Vs
**RESPONDENT: Registrar of Birth and Death The Tahshildar, Doddaballapur Taluk, Doddaballapur.**
**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**
It is hereby notified to the public that the above petitioner, in the Hon'ble Court, her father-in-law, Late Lakshminarasimhacharya, s/o Late Narasimahai, died on 10.04.1929 at Kallukote village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk and since there are no official records of his death, she has filed an application to register the date of death in the Register of Births and Deaths, 1969. Therefore, if the public has any objection, we hereby inform you to appear before the above court on at 25.02.2026 AM. Failing that, the case will be disposed of unilaterally in his absence.
The publication is dated: 24.01.2026 with the signature and seal of the court.
**By order of the court**
**Chief Ministeral Officer Prl Civil Judge & JMFC Doddaballapura**
Advocate for petitioner: **Ambareesha C.**

**IN THE COURT OF THE ADDITIONAL CIVIL JUDGE & JMFC AT DODDABALLAPUR**
**C.misc.No. 1245/2025**
**PETITIONER: Smt. Venkatalakshmamma** W/o Late Ramaswamy Aged about 80 years, R/at Kallukote Village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk, Bengalore Rural District. Vs
**RESPONDENT: Registrar of Birth and Death The Tahshildar, Doddaballapur Taluk, Doddaballapur.**
**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**
It is hereby notified to the public that the above petitioner, in the Hon'ble Court, her father-in-law, Late Venkatanarasappa, s/o Late Lakshminarasimhacharya, died on 14.03.1934 at Kallukote village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk and since there are no official records of his death, she has filed an application to register the date of death in the Register of Births and Deaths, 1969. Therefore, if the public has any objection, we hereby inform you to appear before the above court on at 25.02.2026 AM. Failing that, the case will be disposed of unilaterally in his absence.
The publication is dated: 24.01.2026 with the signature and seal of the court.
**By order of the court**
**Chief Ministeral Officer Prl Civil Judge & JMFC Doddaballapura**
Advocate for petitioner: **Ambareesha C.**

**IN THE COURT OF THE ADDITIONAL CIVIL JUDGE & JMFC AT DODDABALLAPUR**
**C.misc.No. 1247/2025**
**PETITIONER: Smt. Venkatalakshmamma** W/o Late Ramaswamy Aged about 80 years, R/at Kallukote Village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk, Bengalore Rural District. Vs
**RESPONDENT: Registrar of Birth and Death The Tahshildar, Doddaballapur Taluk, Doddaballapur.**
**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**
It is hereby notified to the public that the above petitioner, in the Hon'ble Court, her Sister-in-law, Late Lakshminarasamma, W/o Late Narasimahai @ Narasihachar, died on 21.12.1934 at Kallukote village, Tubagere Hobli, Doddaballapur Taluk and since there are no official records of his death, she has filed an application to register the date of death in the Register of Births and Deaths, 1969. Therefore, if the public has any objection, we hereby inform you to appear before the above court on at 25.02.2026 AM. Failing that, the case will be disposed of unilaterally in his absence.
The publication is dated: 24.01.2026 with the signature and seal of the court.
**By order of the court**
**Chief Ministeral Officer Prl Civil Judge & JMFC Doddaballapura**
Advocate for petitioner: **Ambareesha C.**

## QUICK READ

### 'Society progress linked to empowering girl child'

**Amaravati**
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Saturday that a society can achieve real progress only when its daughters are empowered, protected, and given equal opportunities. Speaking on National Girl Child Day, he urged people to recommit to supporting and uplifting the girl child. Naidu emphasized that girls should have equal chances in education, work, and nation-building, highlighting their vital role in the country's growth and future development.

### 2 wagons of goods train derailed near Maksi

**Shajapur**
Two wagons of a goods train derailed near Maksi railway station in Shajapur district of Madhya Pradesh on Saturday around 1 pm, officials said. The wagons were carrying containers and went off the tracks between the Ujjain and Guna rail section. The incident reportedly occurred after bulls came onto the tracks. Railway authorities confirmed that train movement on the route was not affected, and no injuries were reported.

### CBSE makes counsellors mandatory in schools

**Kota**
The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made it mandatory for all affiliated schools to appoint mental health and career counsellors. The decision aims to support students' well-being and provide structured career guidance. The move follows a Public Interest Litigation filed in Rajasthan High Court in July 2025 highlighting academic stress and mental health challenges among students. Schools are now required to follow the updated CBSE bye-laws to ensure qualified counsellors and proper student support.

# Prez Murmu to address nation on Republic Day eve

The 77th R-Day celebrations will carry significant diplomatic weight as top European Union leaders will be present as chief guests.

**NEW DELHI**

President Droupadi Murmu is set to address the nation on Sunday, ahead of the 77th Republic Day celebrations.

As per a statement by the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the address will be broadcast from 7 pm on the entire national network of Akashvani and telecast over all channels of Doordarshan in Hindi followed by the English version. The broadcast of the address in Hindi and English on Doordarshan will be followed by broadcast in regional languages by regional channels of Doordarshan. Akashvani will broadcast regional language versions from 9.30 om onwards on its respective regional networks.

### European Union leaders to attend R-Day parade

On the other hand, India's 77th Republic Day celebrations on January 26 will carry significant diplomatic weight as top European Union leaders will be present as chief guests. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa will attend the parade at Kartavya Path, New Delhi. This is the first time the EU's top leadership has been invited together, signaling a deeper engagement between India and Brussels. Von der Leyen arrived in India on Saturday for a State Visit, greeted by Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and Electronics & IT, Jitin Prasada. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) welcomed her visit as a step toward advancing the India–EU Strategic Partnership, emphasising the shared democratic values of both sides. Earlier, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President Kaja Kallas also arrived in New Delhi for her first official visit. The MEA described her visit as timely for strengthening India–EU ties amid ongoing geopolitical uncertainties.

### India–EU strategic cooperation in focus

The EU leaders' visit comes amid intensified India–EU diplomatic engagement. On Thursday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with EU ambassadors in New Delhi to discuss global volatility and the need for enhanced cooperation.

"Spoke to EU ambassadors about a world where volatility and instability have become the new normal," Jaishankar said on X (formerly Twitter). He emphasised that closer India–EU cooperation could help stabilise the global economy, enhance supply chain resilience, support humanitarian and disaster relief efforts, and strengthen trade, mobility, and security partnerships.

During their visit, President von der Leyen and President Costa will meet President Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for both restricted and delegation-level talks. They will also co-chair the 16th India–EU Summit on January 27.

# Prez Murmu to kick off 16th National Voters' Day

**NEW DELHI**

Ahead of Republic Day, President Murmu will also preside over the 16th National Voters' Day (NVD-2026) celebrations on Sunday. The event, themed "My India, My Vote" with the tagline "Citizen at the Heart of Indian Democracy", will see the president handing over Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) to newly enrolled young voters. Union Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal will be the Guest of Honour, while Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, will lead the proceedings.

During the event, President Murmu will present the Best Electoral Practices Awards across categories including election management, innovative voter awareness, effective use of technology, and implementation of the Model Code of Conduct. The NVD celebrations will include the launch of two publications: "2025: A Year of Initiatives and Innovations" and "Chunav Ka Parv, Bihar Ka Garv", highlighting the successful conduct of Bihar's General Elections. A video showcasing the Election Commission of India's leadership in electoral management globally will also be screened.

**Expo on election process**

An exhibition detailing the election process, from preparation of electoral rolls to the conduct of elections, will be part of the celebrations. Simultaneous events will also be held nationwide at State and District levels through the offices of Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) and District Election Officers (DEOs). Booth Level Officers (BLOs) will felicitate new voters at their polling stations, distributing EPICs.

*The party condemned 'forced' takeover of tribal lands in Great Nicobar, terming it completely unacceptable.*

# Congress slams Modi government over Great Nicobar Project

**NEW DELHI**

The Congress on Saturday strongly criticized the Modi government over the Great Nicobar Island infrastructure project, calling it "ecologically disastrous" and claiming the government is ignoring petitions and expert concerns. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh shared reports that tribal members in Little and Great Nicobar allege pressure from the district administration to "surrender" their ancestral lands for the project.

Ramesh said on X that despite petitions being heard in the Calcutta High Court and the National Green Tribunal, and repeated warnings from professionals, the government remains indifferent. He called the coercion of tribals "unacceptable" and highlighted the ecological risks posed by the project.

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi also criticized the project, describing it as a "planned misadventure" threatening the survival of indigenous communities. She alleged that the government has bypassed proper legal and deliberative procedures to push the project forward.

In response, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav defended the project, stating that all necessary clearances were obtained and describing it as important for India's development.

The Great Nicobar project, which aims to build major infrastructure on the island, has raised concerns among environmentalists and local communities about displacement, ecological damage, and disruption of tribal life. Congress leaders emphasized that such projects must balance development with protection of indigenous rights and the environment, warning against decisions made without adequate consultation.

The controversy continues to draw attention nationally, with legal proceedings and public debates highlighting the tension between development goals and ecological and tribal protections.

# Will raise 'issues' with leadership: Tharoor

**KOZHIKODE**

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday said he has some "issues" with the party that he intends to discuss with the leadership, while asserting that he has never violated the party's positions in Parliament. Speaking at the Kerala Literature Festival, Tharoor emphasized that internal differences should be addressed within the organisation and not aired publicly.

His remarks come amid reports that he was upset over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi not acknowledging his presence at a recent Kochi event and over alleged attempts by state leaders to sideline him. Tharoor said he

would take up his concerns with the party leadership during his upcoming visit to Delhi for Parliament sessions, aiming for a proper discussion in the appropriate forum.

He also clarified that he had informed party leaders about his inability to attend certain meetings, citing travel commitments and participation in literature festivals. Tharoor said he would continue to attend all parliamentary party activities and planned to exhibit his book on Sree Narayana Guru at the festival.

On national security, Tharoor recalled his firm support for Operation Sindoor after the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025. He explained that he had advocated for a precise military response to terror launchpads in Pakistan, which the government implemented. Despite the party's discomfort at the time, Tharoor defended his stance, saying India's security must always come first.

He concluded by stressing that political differences are normal, but national interest must prevail, noting that when the country's safety is at stake, India's welfare comes before party politics.

# 8 arrested for digital fraud case targeting elderly NRI couple

**NEW DELHI**

The Delhi Police on Saturday arrested eight people from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha in connection with the alleged duping of an elderly NRI couple of over Rs 14 crore through a "digital arrest" scam. The operation also exposed a cyber-fraud racket with links to operators in Cambodia and Nepal.

The accused include Divyang Patel (30) and Krutik Shitole (26) from Vadodara, Mahavir Sharma (27) from Bhubaneswar, Ankit Mishra from Gujarat, Arun Kumar Tiwari (45) and Pradyuman Tiwari (44) from Varanasi, and Bhupender Kumar Mishra (37) and Aadesh Kumar Singh (36) from Lucknow. The arrests took place between January 15 and 21.

Police said the 77-year-old victim from Greater Kailash, Delhi, was contacted in December 2025 about a SIM card linked to a money-laundering case. Fraudsters posed as CBI and police officials, conducted fake video court proceedings, and coerced the couple into transferring money into "RBI-mandated accounts" under threat, completing eight transactions totaling Rs 14.84 crore.

The accused acted as facilitators, procuring and operating mule accounts, while the international syndicate controlled the flow of funds. Technical surveillance and bank account analysis helped police track the money trail. Seven mobile phones and chequebooks were seized during the operation.

Police said further investigation is ongoing to uncover the complete money trail and identify additional conspirators.

# Over 70 fugitives wanted by India located abroad

*Continued from page 1*

According to the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, over 70 fugitives wanted by India were located abroad during 2024-25. This marks the highest number in more than a decade. During the same period, 203 fugitives wanted by other countries were found in India, while 27 fugitives returned from abroad.

The report also highlighted the work of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as the National Central Bureau (NCB) for Interpol. Between April 2024 and March 2025, 74 Letters Rogatory (LRs) were sent abroad—54 by CBI and 20 by state and central agencies. Of these, 47 LRs were fully executed, and 29 partially executed or closed. As of March 31, 2025, 533 LRs remained pending with other countries.

NCB-India issued various Interpol notices, including 126 red notices for provisional arrest, 89 blue notices seeking information, 24 yellow notices for missing persons, seven black notices for unidentified bodies, and one green notice for potential threats. CBI coordinates with foreign law enforcement, Interpol bureaux, and Indian ministries to bring wanted fugitives back.

The report also covered citizenship and passport-related data. Between April 2024 and March 2025, CBI processed over 22,200 renunciation applications. Additionally, 1,91,031 lost, stolen, or revoked Indian passports were uploaded in Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database, with 30 cases detected using these records.

This data underscores India's growing cooperation with international agencies to track fugitives and secure the return of wanted individuals, strengthening law enforcement and border security.

## High courts should be more proactive guardians: CJI

**MUMBAI**

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday urged high courts to be more proactive and alert to systematic failures in the rule of law. Speaking at the Fali Nariman memorial lecture and a felicitation programme by the Bombay High Court, he stressed that "justice delayed is not only justice denied but it is justice destroyed." CJI Kant said high courts should not remain only appellate or revisional bodies but act as accessible centres for constitutional remedies. "High courts are the primary sentinel guarding ordinary citizens, ensuring that the rule of law is not distant but a living reality," he said. Highlighting mediation and reconciliation, he added that alternative dispute resolution preserves relationships, reduces costs, and allows courts to focus on cases requiring authoritative adjudication. The CJI also called for strengthening high courts in the digital era and warned against bypassing them for direct Supreme Court access. He said further.

VOTES OVER LIVES

# *Mass dog killings rock Telangana, toll touches 900*

**HYDERABAD**

Animal rights activists have claimed that stray dog killings continue in Telangana, with the toll reportedly reaching 900. In a recent incident, around 300 dogs were allegedly killed in Pegadapally village, Jagtial district, on January 22. The act is suspected to have been carried out by local elected representatives, including Sarpanchs, allegedly to fulfill promises made to villagers before gram panchayat elections in December.

A complaint alleged that the village Sarpanch hired individuals to poison the stray dogs. Following the complaint, police registered an FIR under relevant sections of the BNS and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. Inspector Ch. Kiran said that during an inquest, 70–80 dog carcasses were exhumed, appearing to have been buried three to four days earlier. Post-mortem reports are awaited, and further investigation is ongoing.

Several similar incidents were reported in January alone. Animal activists claimed that 100 dogs were poisoned in Yacharam village on January 19, with 50 carcasses recovered immediately. Earlier, nine people, including two women sarpanches and their husbands, were booked for allegedly killing 300 dogs in Shayampet and Arepally villages, Hanamkonda district. In Kamareddy district, around 200 stray dogs were reportedly killed, and six people, including five village sarpanches, were booked.

The repeated incidents have sparked outrage among activists, who demand strict action and better measures to control the stray dog population without resorting to cruelty. Authorities continue to investigate the latest case, while public concern over animal welfare grows.

QUICK READ

### DRI seizes gold hidden inside meat grinder

**Mumbai**

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seized gold worth Rs 2.89 crore hidden in a meat grinder at Mumbai's International Courier Terminal. Acting on a tip-off, officials checked a consignment from Saudi Arabia and found 32 pieces of gold weighing 1.815 kg inside the machine. Two people, who were to collect the shipment using fake company documents, were caught. The seizure was made under the Customs Act, and further investigations are ongoing.

### Delhi cops arrest 8 in digital arrest scam

**New Delhi**

Delhi Police have arrested eight men for duping an elderly NRI couple of over Rs 14 crore in a "digital arrest" scam. Authorities have frozen Rs 2.08 crore so far. The scam involved cyber fraudsters who threatened the victims online. Investigations revealed links to operators in Cambodia and Nepal. Police said the arrested suspects were part of a larger racket that tricked people into paying huge sums. Further probe is ongoing to trace the remaining money.

### Police probe bomb threats to Guwahati schools

**Guwahati**

Guwahati police have launched an investigation after two schools received bomb threat emails on Friday. Delhi Public School, Ahomgaon, and Sanskriti-The Gurukul were targeted during Saraswati Puja celebrations. Bomb squads searched the schools but found no explosives. Officials said the threats were hoaxes, but they are checking if other schools received similar emails. Authorities are also tracing the source of the messages and examining all angles. Police stressed a thorough probe is ongoing to ensure student safety.

# BJP transformed UP from 'beemaru' to breakthrough state: Shah

'The HM says the state is poised to become the engine of a developed India by 2047'

**LUCKNOW**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday praised Uttar Pradesh's transformation under the BJP government, calling it a "breakthrough state" during the Uttar Pradesh Day celebrations in Lucknow. He criticized opposition parties, including Congress, Samajwadi Party, and Bahujan Samaj Party, for turning the state into a "beemaru" state during their rule. Shah said development now reaches every village, reversing decades of neglect. He also expressed hope that by August 15, 2047, Uttar Pradesh will be fully developed and contribute significantly to a "Viksit Bharat."

Shah emphasized the state's strategic role in India's economy, calling it the "heartbeat" of the nation. He said Uttar Pradesh has moved from being a labour source to becoming a growth engine, highlighting the state's industrial, cultural, and religious significance. Uttar Pradesh is home to sacred rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saryu, and historical and religious cities such as Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura, Vrindavan, Prayagraj, Sarnath, and Kushinagar, attracting millions of pilgrims annually.

**Shah honours astronaut Shukla**

During the event, Shah honoured astronaut and Indian Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla with the 'Uttar Pradesh Gaurav' award for his contributions to innovation and space exploration. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brijesh Pathak, and other senior leaders attended the ceremony.

Uttar Pradesh Day, celebrated annually on January 24, commemorates the renaming of the United Provinces as Uttar Pradesh in 1950. Leaders highlighted the state's historical legacy and its evolving role in India's growth, combining its cultural heritage with rapid economic and social development.

# Rushed SIR in Bengal may harm democracy: Sen

**KOLKATA**

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has expressed serious concern over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, warning that the process is being rushed and may undermine democratic participation ahead of upcoming assembly elections. Speaking from Boston, the 92-year-old economist told that electoral roll revisions must be conducted carefully and with adequate time—conditions he says are missing in Bengal.

Sen explained that hurried SIR exercises limit voters' ability to submit documents and prove eligibility, which is unfair to citizens and the democratic process. Drawing from personal experience, he recounted difficulties he faced in proving his right to vote from Santiniketan. Even official records were questioned, including details about his deceased mother, highlighting procedural gaps. He noted that citizens from rural areas often face similar challenges, especially without birth certificates or easy access to documentation.

The economist emphasized that structural disadvantages put poorer and marginalized groups at risk of exclusion, as obtaining required documents can be difficult. "The class bias in demanding documentation tends to work against the indigent," he said.

Sen expressed deep concern over West Bengal's electoral roll revision process, citing "undue haste" and inadequate time for voters.

While Sen did not offer a definitive view on political consequences, he stressed that electoral integrity should remain the priority. He urged the Election Commission to avoid faulty arrangements that could compromise democratic values, regardless of potential party benefits.

Sen's warning underscores the importance of careful preparation in electoral processes to ensure fair participation for all citizens, particularly the underprivileged, in one of India's most politically significant states.

## Speeding luxury car hits guardrail during R-Day rehearsals

**KOLKATA**

A luxury car lost control and rammed into a guardrail on Red Road, Kolkata, on Saturday morning during rehearsals for the Republic Day parade, police said. The car was reportedly speeding when officers signalled the driver to stop, but he tried to flee, crashing into the guardrail instead.

No one was injured in the incident, but the accident raised security concerns as it recalled a 2016 tragedy when a high-end car broke through barricades during parade rehearsals, killing Air Force corporal Abhimanyu Gaud. Authorities seized the vehicle and detained the driver for questioning.

A Maidan police officer said the driver is being interrogated to determine why he entered a restricted area and attempted to evade police instructions. Officials also noted that the car lacked a valid insurance and pollution under control (PUC) certificate, adding to the violation.

Police emphasized that the Red Road area is strictly monitored during Republic Day rehearsals to ensure the safety of participants and the public. They warned that anyone violating security protocols would face strict action.

The incident has prompted authorities to review security measures around the parade route. Additional checks and barricades are expected to prevent unauthorized vehicles from entering sensitive zones during the upcoming Republic Day celebrations.

Officials reiterated that ensuring public safety during rehearsals and the main event remains a top priority, and any breach will be met with strict enforcement.

## 'You cannot finish Shiv Sena': Uddhav hits out at BJP

**MUMBAI**

Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Friday asserted that the BJP cannot finish his party, calling it more than a political organisation, but an idea. He made the statement while addressing party workers during the birth centenary celebrations of late Bal Thackeray, the founder of the original Shiv Sena. Uddhav said many forces are trying to erase the Thackeray legacy, but their efforts are failing.

His remarks came after the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the Mumbai civic polls held on January 15, winning 89 out of 227 seats. In alliance with Deputy CM Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, which won 29 seats, the BJP ended decades of Thackeray control over India's richest civic body.

The Shiv Sena (UBT)–Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) alliance gave a stronger-than-expected performance but could not stop the BJP-led Mahayuti from crossing the majority. Uddhav's party won 65 seats, while Raj Thackeray's MNS secured six seats.

Thackeray also alleged that the civic polls witnessed unprecedented use of money power, impacting fair competition. He urged party workers to stay committed to the party's ideals and continue strengthening its presence across Maharashtra.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader stressed that despite electoral setbacks, the party's values and ideology remain intact. He called upon workers to uphold the Thackeray legacy, insisting that political challenges cannot erase the idea that Shiv Sena (UBT) represents, ensuring it continues to inspire supporters and future generations across the state.

## Odisha hails inclusion of 3 Buddhist sites in UNESCO list

**BHUBANESWAR**

The Odisha government on Saturday welcomed the inclusion of three of its prominent Buddhist sites—Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri, and Udaygiri—in India's Tentative List for UNESCO World Heritage Site recognition. Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida, who oversees tourism, called it a milestone for heritage, conservation, and sustainable tourism, saying these sites have journeyed from ancient wisdom to global recognition.

Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan referred to the three locations as Odisha's "Diamond Triangle," highlighting their cultural and historical significance. UNESCO's World Heritage Centre confirmed the inclusion in a letter to India's permanent delegate, acknowledging that the documentation submitted by India met operational guidelines. The submission was made on December 22, 2025, by the Archaeological Survey of India, which serves as India's nodal agency for the World Heritage Convention.

These sites are part of the Buddhist circuit and are known for housing monasteries, stupas, sculptures, and inscriptions representing Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. Historians note that Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri, and Udaygiri played a pivotal role in spreading Buddhism across Asia, showcasing Odisha's rich religious and cultural heritage.

Experts say the UNESCO recognition will boost heritage tourism, promote research, and strengthen conservation efforts in the region. By highlighting the state's Buddhist legacy, officials hope the "Diamond Triangle" will attract global attention, enhancing both educational and cultural value for visitors and scholars alike.

## 'Only Vijay can dethrone DMK in TN'

**CHENNAI**

KA Sengottaiyan, former Tamil Nadu minister and Chief Coordinator of the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), claimed that actor-turned-politician Vijay is the only leader capable of ending the DMK's rule in the state.

Addressing TVK supporters at the party office in Panaiyur, Chennai, Sengottaiyan said Tamil Nadu is approaching a major political turning point and public sentiment is shifting rapidly.

"Vijay was once seen only as a silver-screen hero," he said. "But now he is emerging as Tamil Nadu's political hero, with the courage, credibility, and mass support to bring change." He hinted at a symbolic break from traditional authority, suggesting even police constables might no longer follow old protocols like blowing whistles.

Sengottaiyan also highlighted Vijay's growing support among Tamil voters abroad. He claimed nearly three lakh non-resident Tamils are tracking election dates to return home and vote, with some willing to spend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 1 lakh to cast their vote for Vijay—a phenomenon he called unprecedented in the state.

The TVK leader criticized the NDA, saying its claims of large rallies were exaggerated. "They claimed five lakh people attended, but only 60,000 seats were arranged, and 10,000 were empty. Many were even sleeping," he said, adding that calls to topple the DMK government at these events failed to get applause.

Concluding his remarks, Sengottaiyan insisted that while others may promise change, "the ground reality is clear—only Vijay can bring a new government in Tamil Nadu."

## HP braces for heavy snowfall, issues advisory

**SHIMLA**

The Himachal Pradesh government has issued a statewide advisory ahead of an active western disturbance expected to bring heavy snowfall in higher reaches and rainfall in lower areas between January 26 and 28.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast isolated heavy snowfall and rain, which may disrupt road connectivity, power supply, and essential services.

The Revenue Department instructed all District Disaster Management Authorities to activate Emergency Operation Centres for 24/7 monitoring and update contingency and evacuation plans, especially in snowbound, flood-prone, and low-lying urban areas. Citizens are advised to follow travel advisories and public warnings.

The Public Works Department has pre-positioned snow clearance machinery, including JCBs and snow cutters, while Emergency Response Teams remain ready to restore roads and critical infrastructure. HPSEBL has placed emergency teams on standby to quickly restore electricity, and the Jal Shakti Vibhag will ensure uninterrupted water and sanitation services.

Police and Tourism Departments have been tasked with regulating traffic on vulnerable routes and issuing safety advisories to prevent tourists from entering high-risk areas. Coordination with transport authorities and the State Emergency Operation Centre has been emphasized, with daily situation reports required.

Snow clearance and road restoration operations are ongoing in Shimla and other districts. Heavy snowfall in Shimla, Kullu, Lahaul-Spiti, Chamba, and Kinnaur has blocked over 600 roads, causing difficulties for locals and visitors. Authorities are working to restore connectivity as quickly as possible.

## Large cache of arms, ammunition seized in Manipur

**IMPHAL**

Security forces in Manipur seized a large cache of arms and ammunition in Imphal East district on Saturday, police said. The recovery took place from the foothills of the Chanung Range, highlighting ongoing efforts to tackle militancy in the state.

Among the weapons recovered were a .303 rifle with a magazine, an SLR without a magazine, eight Single Barrel Breech Loading (SBBL) rifles, a revolver, and a .22 pistol with a magazine. Police also seized 24 rounds of various calibres, five walkie-talkie sets with batteries, and multiple camouflage attires during the operation on Friday.

In a separate operation in Moreh, Tengnoupal district, police arrested a 28-year-old militant identified as Waikhom Athoi. He was a member of the banned National Revolutionary Front of Manipur (NRFM), officials said. A 9 mm pistol with two magazines and 30 live rounds was recovered from him.

Authorities said the operations are part of ongoing security measures to prevent illegal arms circulation and militant activities in the region. Officials emphasized that such seizures help maintain law and order and curb the influence of armed groups.

Security forces continue to conduct operations in sensitive areas of Manipur to ensure public safety. Residents in Imphal East and Tengnoupal districts have been advised to remain vigilant and report suspicious activity to local authorities.

RUBBER DREAMS TAKING ROOT

# *Mizoram plans major expansion of rubber plantations*

**AIZAWL**

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma said the state has 50,000 hectares of land suitable for rubber cultivation. He made the announcement while visiting rubber plantations in Chungtlang village, Mamit district, on Friday.

Lalduhoma said rubber is native to Mizoram and that government initiatives to grow it began in 1982.

Before the Zoram People's Movement came to power in December 2023, only 3,025 hectares were under rubber cultivation. Under the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission, the government plans to cultivate rubber on 11,500 hectares over the next five years. Officials said about 4.5 lakh rubber saplings have already been planted on more than 1,000 hectares in Mamit and Kolasib districts.

The Land Resources, Soil, and Water Conservation Department aims to plant over 11.58 lakh saplings on 2,575 hectares in various districts this year. To support farmers, the government has sanctioned 100 rubber roller machines and tapping tools, and is developing approach roads to plantations. Marketing support for rubber produce will also be provided.

Lalduhoma said these efforts are part of a broader plan to make Mizoram a major rubber-producing state. Officials noted that the expansion of rubber cultivation will create new opportunities for local farmers, improve livelihoods, and boost the state's economy. The government's initiatives aim to modernize plantations, increase productivity, and ensure sustainable growth for the rubber sector.

With careful planning and support for farmers, Mizoram hopes to fully utilise its potential and emerge as a key player in India's rubber industry in the coming years.

## QUICK READ

### Boy, 12, dies from injuries after Sydney shark attack

**SYDNEY**

A young boy who was bitten by a shark in Sydney Harbour last week has died in hospital. Twelve-year-old Nico Antic had been jumping off a rock ledge with friends on 18 January when he was attacked by what authorities suspected was a bull shark. We are heartbroken to share that our son, Nico has passed away, his parents Lorena and Juan said in a statement. The incident was one of four reported shark attacks along the New South Wales coast over 2 days.

### Pentagon to offer 'more limited' support to US allies

**WASHINGTON**

The US will offer more limited support to allies, according to the Pentagon's new National Defense Strategy. In a significant shift to its security priorities, the US Department of Defense now considers security of the US homeland and Western Hemisphere - not China - as its primary concern. Previous versions of the strategy - published every four years - named the threat posed by China as the top defence priority. Relations with China will now be approached through strength, not confrontation, the report says. The defence strategy reinforces recent calls from President Donald Trump, including for greater burden-sharing from allies in countering threats posed by Russia and North Korea.

### US braces for 'extremely dangerous' winter storm

**NEW YORK**

More than 200 million Americans are expected to face an unusually brutal winter storm starting with heavy snows and freezing rains forecast. The storm is expected to sweep through much of the United States, leaving extremely dangerous conditions in its wake as it tracks eastwards from the High Plains and Rockies, the National Weather Service (NWS) said. It warned that the Arctic blast will bring sub-zero temperatures and wind chills, which pose a life-threatening risk of hypothermia and frostbite to exposed skin. US transportation officials, including airport authorities in several major cities, have warned of weekend travel disruption, delays and cancellations.

# Mass Protest in Subzero Minneapolis Challenges Trump Immigration Crackdown

Thousands marched through freezing Minneapolis, shutting businesses, to protest President Trump's immigration crackdown and support immigrant communities nationwide.

**MINNEAPOLIS**

Thousands of demonstrators braved extreme winter conditions to march through the streets of Minneapolis, demanding an end to President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown in the city. The protest, organised under the banner ICE OUT!, unfolded amid temperatures plunging to minus 29 degrees Celsius (minus 20 Fahrenheit), making it one of the coldest mass demonstrations the city has witnessed in recent years.

Organisers claimed that as many as 50,000 people participated in the march, though the figure could not be independently verified. Despite the biting cold, demonstrators filled major streets and public spaces, chanting slogans against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and calling for the protection of immigrant families. As part of the action, dozens of businesses across Minnesota reportedly closed for the day in what organisers described as a general strike, signalling economic as well as political resistance.

The protests followed weeks of heightened tensions in the region, including sometimes violent confrontations between US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and protesters opposed to the administration's stepped-up enforcement operations. Many workers chose to join street protests instead of reporting to their jobs, underscoring the scale of public anger and the depth of solidarity among participating communities.

Reporting from Minneapolis, John Hendren of Al Jazeera highlighted the extraordinary resolve of the demonstrators. It is 23 degrees below zero but the stores are closed and these demonstrators are out braving the coldest day on record since 2019 all to send a simple message to ICE: Get Out, he said, capturing both the harsh conditions and the determination on display.

The demonstrations came just a day after JD Vance, the US Vice President, visited Minneapolis to show support for ICE officers and to urge local leaders and activists to help reduce tensions.

## Survivors Recall Terror Inside Smoke-Filled Karachi Mall Fire

Karachi

Muhammad Imran did not initially realise the danger when he first noticed signs of fire inside a crowded shopping mall in Karachi. Accustomed to minor electrical sparks and small incidents that shop owners usually managed themselves, he assumed the situation would be quickly brought under control. Within moments, however, that assumption proved tragically wrong.

Smoke began seeping rapidly through ventilation ducts, spreading thick, black fumes across the mall. According to Imran, the air darkened in seconds, making it difficult to breathe or see. Soon after, the electricity failed, plunging the building into darkness. Mobile phone flashlights offered little help as visibility dropped to almost zero. You couldn't even see your own hands, he recalled, describing the terrifying speed with which the situation deteriorated. Imran, who suffers from diabetes and has previously undergone heart surgery, said his physical condition made escape even more difficult. As panic spread among shoppers and workers, people stumbled blindly, shouting for help and searching for exits they could no longer see. Imran said he managed to take only a few steps before exhaustion and fear nearly overwhelmed him. It felt like doomsday, he said. You couldn't see the person next to you.

Other survivors echoed similar accounts of confusion and desperation. Many said smoke inhalation set in quickly, causing dizziness and disorientation. In the pitch darkness, people reportedly collided with walls, counters and one another while trying to follow familiar paths that had suddenly become impossible to navigate. The lack of clear emergency lighting or guidance added to the chaos, witnesses said.

# Landslide in Indonesia's West Java Kills Seven

**BANDUNG**

**A deadly landslide in West Java killed seven people, left dozens missing, and triggered large-scale rescue operations Saturday.**

Rescue teams in Indonesia are racing against time to locate survivors after a devastating landslide struck the West Bandung region of Indonesia's West Java province, leaving at least seven people dead and dozens more missing. Local officials said search and rescue operations were being intensified amid fears that further landslides could hamper efforts.

According to Abdul Muhari, spokesperson for Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency, the number of people unaccounted for remains high. The number of missing persons is high, we will try to optimise our search and rescue efforts today, he said on Saturday, stressing the urgency of the operation as heavy debris and unstable terrain complicate access to affected areas.

The landslide hit Pasirlangu village in West Bandung at around 2am local time on Saturday. A powerful surge of water mixed with loose soil cascaded down the slopes of Mount Burangrang, smashing into approximately 30 homes while most residents were asleep. The suddenness of the disaster left little time for escape. Local Police Chief AY Yogaswara said the landslide was accompanied by flash flooding, worsening the destruction. Speaking to Jakarta-based Yogaswara said residents recalled hearing a loud rumbling sound moments before torrents of mud and water engulfed parts of the village. Several houses were buried or severely damaged, trapping occupants inside.

Emergency response efforts are being carried out jointly by Indonesia's armed forces, the regional disaster management agency, local police, volunteers, and community members. Heavy machinery, sniffer dogs, and manual digging are being deployed in the search for survivors, though officials warn that ongoing rainfall and unstable slopes pose serious risks to rescuers.

Fearing further tragedy, local authorities have ordered the evacuation of residents living in areas known to be prone to landslides. The affected zone is estimated to span nearly 30 hectares (74 acres), according to Kompas.

*Prince Harry condemned remarks on Afghanistan, urging respect for Nato sacrifices after claims allies avoided front lines there*

# Prince Harry Defends Nato Troops After Trump Claims

**LONDON**

The Duke of Sussex has called for the sacrifices made by Nato troops in Afghanistan to be discussed truthfully and with respect, following controversial comments by former US president Donald Trump suggesting that allied forces stayed a little back from the front lines during the conflict.

Prince Harry reflected on his own military service as he paid tribute to Nato personnel who lost their lives during the war, including 457 British service members. I served there. I made lifelong friends there. And I lost friends there, the prince said, underlining the personal cost of the conflict for those who took part.

Prince Harry, who was deployed twice to Afghanistan during his time in the British Army, emphasised that the experiences of allied soldiers should not be diminished or misrepresented. His remarks were widely seen as a direct response to Trump's comments made during a televised interview in which the former president appeared to downplay the role of US allies in frontline combat operations.

The comments have triggered strong reactions across Nato countries, where thousands of troops were deployed alongside US forces over two decades of fighting. Allied governments and veterans have stressed that soldiers from multiple nations fought and died in some of the most dangerous regions of the country, often operating jointly with American units.

In the UK, Prime Minister Keir Starmer strongly criticised Trump's remarks, calling them insulting and frankly appalling. Starmer said the comments failed to acknowledge the bravery and sacrifices of British and allied troops who served in Afghanistan under extremely difficult conditions.

Nato's mission in Afghanistan, which began in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, involved forces from dozens of countries and resulted in significant military and civilian casualties. For many veterans and families of the fallen, recognition of that shared sacrifice remains deeply important.

## China Launches Investigation into Senior Military Leaders

**BEIJING**

China's ruling Communist Party has decided to open an investigation into two of the country's most senior military officials, Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, for suspected serious violations of discipline and law, the defence ministry said on Saturday. The announcement marks a significant development within China's military establishment and underscores the leadership's continued focus on internal discipline and control.

According to the defence ministry, Zhang Youxia is a member of the elite Politburo of the ruling Communist Party of China and serves as vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Liu Zhenli, meanwhile, is the chief of staff of the CMC Joint Staff Department, a key operational arm responsible for coordinating China's military planning and readiness.

Zhang, 75, is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in the People's Liberation Army. A veteran officer known for his role in modernising China's armed forces, he is often seen as President Xi Jinping's closest military ally. Zhang is also among a small group of senior Chinese officers with direct combat experience, a factor that has long bolstered his standing within the military hierarchy. As one of the two vice-chairmen of the CMC, he occupies a pivotal position in China's supreme military command structure. The investigation into Liu Zhenli is equally significant, given his role overseeing joint operations and staff coordination across China's armed services. As chief of staff of the Joint Staff Department, Liu has been closely involved in shaping military preparedness and operational integration at a time when Beijing has been emphasising combat readiness and reform, While the defence ministry did not provide further details on the alleged violations.

## SUDOKU

**Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?**

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| | 8 | | 2 | | 1 | | | 6 |
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| 2 | | 5 | | 4 | | 7 | | 9 |

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| 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 6 |
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| 4 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| 9 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 5 |
| 5 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 9 |

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

**Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.**

**UKRAINE CONDEMNS STRIKES**

# *Ukraine Condemns Deadly Russian Strikes*

**KYIV**

Ukraine has strongly condemned a fresh wave of overnight Russian strikes that killed at least one person and injured 23 others, warning that the attacks risk undermining renewed diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the war. The strikes came as talks involving Ukraine, Russia and the United States are set to resume, raising concerns that continued military escalation could derail fragile negotiations.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha described the assault as brutal and said it was cynically ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin. In a strongly worded statement, Sybiha said the latest bombardment had hit not only our people, but also the negotiation table, arguing that Russia's actions contradicted any stated willingness to pursue a diplomatic settlement.

According to Ukrainian officials, the strikes targeted multiple areas overnight, damaging civilian infrastructure and prompting emergency services to respond to fires and collapsed buildings. Authorities said the wounded included civilians, reinforcing Kyiv's long-standing accusation that Moscow continues to show disregard for civilian lives. Russia has not immediately commented on the specific allegations surrounding the latest attacks.

The renewed violence comes as delegations from Ukraine, Russia and the United States have been meeting in Abu Dhabi for the first trilateral talks since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The meetings mark a rare moment of direct engagement among the three parties amid a conflict that has caused widespread destruction and displaced millions.

A source familiar with the discussions told BBC that some progress had been made during the talks, although major obstacles remain. Chief among them is the question of territory, a deeply contentious issue that continues to divide Kyiv and Moscow. Ukraine has consistently demanded the full restoration of its internationally recognised borders, while Russia maintains control over large swathes of occupied land.

Analysts say the timing of the overnight strikes could complicate diplomatic efforts, hardening positions on both sides and reducing trust at a critical moment. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly called on Western partners to increase pressure on Moscow, arguing that sustained military aggression shows Russia is not serious about peace.

## Syrian, Kurdish Forces Face Truce Deadline

**RAQQA**

Syrian government forces and Kurdish-led fighters were positioned on opposite sides of tense front lines in northern Syria on Saturday, as a crucial evening deadline approached that would determine whether hostilities would resume or a fragile ceasefire would hold. The standoff has raised fears of renewed violence in a region already battered by years of conflict, displacement and shifting alliances. The confrontation involves forces loyal to the Syrian state and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which control large parts of northeastern Syria. Both sides had mobilised troops and equipment near key طوطخ (front lines), creating a highly volatile situation as negotiations continued behind the scenes. Officials in Turkey, as well as some authorities in Syria, indicated that the deadline could be extended, offering a narrow window for diplomacy to prevent renewed clashes.

## QUICK READ

### Adani Electricity Retains A+ National Power Ranking

**Ahmedabad**

Adani Electricity has retained its A+ national ranking in the 14th Annual Integrated Rating and Ranking of Power Distribution Utilities by state-run Power Finance Corporation. The company earned the top grade for reliable supply, low power losses, and strong finances. Adani Electricity said the honour reflects the trust of Mumbai consumers as it completes 100 years of service, powering homes, hospitals, and essential services. The rating also marks a milestone as India's power distribution sector reported profits in FY25.

### Apple iPhone Shipments Jump Sharply in India

**New Delhi**

Apple recorded strong growth in India in 2025 as iPhone shipments rose 24 per cent compared to the previous year, according to CyberMedia Research. iPhones outperformed iPads, which grew by 2 per cent during the year. The iPhone 16 series emerged as the top performer, accounting for over half of total shipments. Analysts said steady demand and new launches supported Apple's growth, even as iPhone shipments dipped slightly in the final quarter of the year.

### FII Confidence Hinges on Earnings, Trade Deal

**New Delhi**

Foreign investor confidence in Indian markets may return if corporate earnings improve in the next quarter and a US-India trade deal is finalised, analysts said. While earnings are expected to recover in the January–March quarter, uncertainty over the trade deal remains a key concern. Foreign portfolio investors continued heavy selling in January, leading to sharp market losses. Weak rupee, poor quarterly results, and policy uncertainty have kept sentiments low, causing a notable fall in indices and market capitalisation.

# GOYAL LISTS MAJOR POLICY AND TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

Several recent initiatives highlighted progress in women entrepreneurship support, agricultural exports, and global market access

**NEW DELHI**

Commerce minister Piyush Goyal outlined major startup, trade, and export milestones from recent weeks nationwide. Over the past two weeks, several events drew attention to India's economic and policy progress. One of the biggest highlights was the completion of ten years of the Startup India initiative. A special event was held in Delhi on January sixteen, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, startup founders, innovators, and young entrepreneurs from across the country. The day was marked as National Startup Day.

During the celebrations, results of the fifth States' Startup Ranking Exercise and the National Startup Awards were announced. The prime minister said Indian youth are focused on solving real problems and building practical solutions. He praised startup founders for creating jobs, supporting innovation, and improving India's global image through their work.

Goyal also shared details of his meeting with David Eby, the Premier of British Columbia in Canada. The discussions aimed at strengthening the India-Canada economic partnership. Both sides explored cooperation in trade, investment, critical minerals, manufacturing, clean energy, technology, education, defence, and innovation.

The Government e-Marketplace completed seven years of its Womaniya initiative, which helps women-led micro and small enterprises participate in government procurement. An agreement was also signed with the Women's Collective Forum to strengthen support for women entrepreneurs. In exports, APEDA opened a regional office in Raipur to boost Chhattisgarh's farm and processed food shipments. India also recorded its first air export of GI-tagged products from Karnataka to the Maldives, supporting farmers and promoting heritage.

# Power Ministry Concludes Two-Day Chintan Shivir Meet

**Senior officials and experts met to review reforms, energy policy, and long-term plans shaping India's power sector**

**NEW DELHI**

The Ministry of Power concluded a two-day Chintan Shivir held on January 22-23 2026 in Parwanoo, Himachal Pradesh. The meeting brought together senior officials, regulators, state representatives, and industry experts to review challenges and plan the future of India's power sector. Union Power Minister Manohar Lal said the country needs a strong, affordable, and clean electricity system to support the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Discussions focused on the draft Electricity Amendment Bill 2026, which aims to improve financial health of distribution companies, promote competition, and support energy transition. The draft National Electricity Policy 2026 was also reviewed, with targets to raise per capita power use to 2,000 units by 2030 and over 4,000 units by 2047. Participants discussed cutting emission intensity and expanding low-carbon energy sources.

Special sessions focused on speeding up nuclear power development and carrying out long-term reforms in the power distribution sector. Officials also discussed improving transmission systems, promoting distributed energy resources, and expanding storage to achieve a 300 GWh target by 2030. On the second day, discussions centred on strengthening DISCOM finances through policy and regulatory reforms, while rationalising cross-subsidies to boost industry and jobs. Manohar Lal released a CEA report outlining plans for 100 GW of hydro pumped storage by 2035-36, stressing its role in grid stability and clean energy growth.

## RJIL Tops Voice, Data Performance Across Delhi Market

**NEW DELHI**

Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL) has emerged as a leader in voice and data services across Delhi, according to the latest Independent Drive Test (IDT) report by TRAI. The report, based on tests conducted from December 15-18, 2025, covered 347.4 km of city routes and 12 hotspot locations, assessing 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G performance across urban areas, institutional hubs, and high-speed corridors.

In voice services, RJIL recorded a Call Setup Success Rate (CSSR) of 98.36 per cent and achieved the highest Mean Opinion Score (MOS) of 4.44, reflecting superior speech quality. While Bharti Airtel recorded a perfect 100 per cent CSSR, RJIL maintained strong call performance with a low drop rate of 0.36 per cent. Vodafone Idea (VIL) and MTNL reported CSSRs of 99.64 per cent and 95.23 per cent, with call drop rates of 0.00 per cent and 6.60 per cent, respectively. In data services, RJIL led the market with an average download speed of 265.51 Mbps, far ahead of Airtel (168.92 Mbps), VIL (34.35 Mbps), and MTNL (4.40 Mbps).

*The Reserve Bank of India announced fresh steps to effectively manage liquidity conditions in the financial system*

## States' Fiscal Deficit Rises to 3.3 per cent

**MUMBAI**

States' consolidated gross fiscal deficit increased to 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2024-25, after remaining below 3 per cent for the previous three years, according to the Reserve Bank of India's annual report State Finances: A Study of Budgets. The rise largely reflects 50-year interest-free loans from the Centre under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, which are over and above normal borrowing limits.

For 2025-26, States have budgeted a similar deficit of 3.3 per cent while aiming to control revenue spending. The report noted that consolidated outstanding liabilities of States fell to 28.1 per cent of GDP at end-March 2024, down from 31 per cent in 2021, reflecting fiscal consolidation and favourable debt trends. These liabilities are expected to rise to 29.2 per cent by March 2026.

The RBI highlighted differences among States due to demographic transition. Youthful States benefit from a growing working-age population and stronger revenue potential, while ageing States face fiscal pressure from shrinking tax bases and rising obligations. The report suggests that States leverage their demographic position through human capital investment, healthcare, pension reforms, and revenue mobilisation to ensure sustainable finances in the long term.

This year's report focuses on "Demographic Transition in India – Implications for State Finances," covering actuals for 2023-24 and budget estimates up to 2025-26.

The RBI plans liquidity-boosting measures following a review of financial conditions. These include a Rs 25,000 crore 90-day VRR on January 30, a USD 10 billion/INR swap on February 4, and Rs 1 lakh crore in OMO purchase auctions on February 5 and 12. The central bank will issue detailed instructions for each operation and continue monitoring market conditions to maintain orderly liquidity.

## Skoda Slavia Facelift Set To Launch By 2026

**NEW DELHI**

Skoda Auto India is preparing to launch the facelifted version of its popular sedan, Slavia, by 2026, following the recent update of its Kushaq SUV. The company confirmed the timeline during an interaction with NDTV Automate.

The refreshed Slavia has been spotted testing on multiple occasions, hinting at design and feature updates. The facelift will include a redesigned front grille with vertical slats, revised headlamps and fog lamps, and a reworked bumper with a web-style air dam. At the rear, the taillights and bumper are expected to be updated, giving the car a modernized look.

Inside, the cabin is likely to receive upgrades from the Kushaq, including refreshed upholstery, an improved infotainment system, a redesigned digital instrument cluster, and possibly a panoramic sunroof. Higher variants may even offer rear seat massage functionality.

Mechanically, the facelifted Slavia is expected to retain its current engines: a 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbo-petrol producing 115 hp with manual and automatic options, and a 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbo-petrol delivering 150 hp paired with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic. Skoda may also introduce an eight-speed torque converter automatic, similar to the Kushaq update.

The Slavia facelift aims to stay competitive in the mid-size sedan segment against rivals like Volkswagen Virtus, Hyundai Verna, and Honda City, all of which are scheduled for updates in the coming years.

## India's Tax-to-GDP Ratio Matches Major Global Economies

**NEW DELHI**

India's combined tax-to-GDP ratio, including central and state revenues, stands at 19.6 per cent, putting it on par with many major global economies, according to a Bank of Baroda report. While central gross tax revenue is lower at 11.7 per cent, the integrated figure surpasses several emerging markets such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

The report highlights that the ratio still trails advanced economies like Germany (38%) and the US (25.6%), indicating significant potential for growth given India's favourable demographics. Structural reforms, including the Income Tax Act 2025, corporate tax rationalisation, digitisation, and simplification of compliance, are driving revenue convergence.

Historical data show stronger alignment between tax collections and nominal GDP since FY14, with pronounced convergence from FY23 onwards. The current tax elasticity of 1.1 is above the long-term average. Income tax collections correlate strongly with nominal GDP and per capita income, while corporate tax buoyancy reflects improved corporate earnings.

Granger Causality tests confirm a mutual influence between tax and GDP, though long-run cointegration remains weak, suggesting that revenue growth depends on structural reforms rather than mere economic expansion. The upcoming implementation of the Income Tax Act 2025 on April 1, 2026, is expected to improve efficiency, target the informal sector, and further strengthen India's tax collections, supporting fiscal stability and sustainable growth.

## FIEO Says EU GSP Withdrawal Has Limited Export Impact

**NEW DELHI**

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said the European Union's extension of the withdrawal of GSP benefits for select Indian products will have limited impact on exports.

It noted that although reports claim 87% of shipments fall in affected categories, many items already attract zero duty under the EU's MFN rates.

Several tariff lines also remain eligible under GSP if rules of origin are met. The move extends an existing policy, with no new products added.

Exporters were urged to assess exposure at HS-code level accurately carefully.

## PayU Launches 'Startup Republic' Celebrating 10 Yrs

**NEW DELHI**

PayU has launched Startup Republic, a nationwide campaign celebrating entrepreneurial excellence across all 36 states and Union Territories, marking a decade of Startup India.

The initiative spotlights India's expanding startup ecosystem and highlights founders beyond major urban centres. As of December 31, 2025, India has over two lakh DPIIT-recognised startups, generating employment for more than 2.1 million people, with women accounting for over 45% of founders in leadership roles.

The campaign includes a 120-second hero film and 36 five-minute documentaries profiling founders from each state and UT across diverse sectors.

PayU said the initiative reinforces its partnership with DPIIT, offering startups payment solutions, mentorship, community access and fundraising support to scale innovation nationwide.

## Union Budget Prepared Amid Strong Growth, Low Inflation Outlook

**NEW DELHI**

The upcoming Union Budget is being prepared under a better-than-expected growth and inflation scenario, said Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist at Crisil. He noted that economic growth in 2025-26 exceeded earlier expectations, while inflation remained lower than projected, giving the government room to focus on fiscal prudence and economic stability.

Joshi highlighted that higher nominal GDP will support stronger tax collections and improved corporate performance. The government has revised the GDP forecast for FY 2025-26 to 7.3–7.4 per cent, up from 6.3 per cent, while real growth is expected around 6.7 per cent next year. He also mentioned that GDP re-basing on February 27 could further change perceptions of India's economic size and growth trajectory.

On international trade, Joshi stressed the need for agreements with the United States and the European Union to reduce uncertainty for exporters, citing high tariffs as a challenge.

He pointed out that while central government fiscal targets are likely to be met, state deficits remain a concern due to higher-than-budgeted borrowing. Private capital expenditure is improving in sectors like steel, cement, and oil and gas but is not yet broad-based.

Looking ahead, the budget may focus on reforms aligned with the 'Viksit Bharat by 2047' vision, including incentives for emerging sectors such as electronics and ACC batteries. Joshi also noted that taxation changes should be minimal, with rationalized income tax rates and lower GST rates helping maintain fiscal stability.

**GULFOOD 2026**

# *India Showcases Agri-Food Strength at Gulfood 2026*

**NEW DELHI**

India will showcase its diverse agri-food strength at Gulfood 2026 with a large and focused presence led by APEDA under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. As Partner Country, India will highlight its role as a trusted food supplier and supporter of global food security and stable supply chains.

The Indian participation covers an exhibition area of 1,434 square metres and includes 161 exhibitors from across the country. These exhibitors represent processed foods, fresh and frozen products, pulses, grains, cereals, beverages, and value-added food items, along with agri-export startups.

The Indian Pavilion brings together exporters, farmer producer organisations, cooperatives, startups, state government bodies, and national institutions. It presents a complete picture of India's agri-food ecosystem and its readiness to serve global markets.

Participants come from 25 states and regions, including Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, and others. Regional specialities, GI-tagged products, organic produce, and processed foods are being highlighted.

Several key national bodies are also taking part, such as NAFED, National Cooperative Exports Limited, Spices Board India, Tea Board of India, National Turmeric Board, rice exporters associations, horticulture boards, and dairy and cooperative agencies from different states. A major attraction is the BHARATI Pavilion, which promotes export-ready agri-food and agri-tech startups. The pavilion also features a special culinary area where a well-known chef will present live cooking demonstrations of Indian dishes.

Gulfood 2026 will be held from January 26 to 30, 2026, at the Dubai World Trade Centre and the Dubai Exhibition Centre at Expo City Dubai venue wide.

# ISHAN KISHAN'S fiery comeback puts Sanju under pressure as India eye series seal

## Ishan Kishan's explosive return sharpens selection debate as India chase series-clinching victory

**GUWAHATI**

Ishan Kishan's sensational comeback has thrown India's opening combination into sharp focus, placing Sanju Samson firmly under pressure as the hosts look to seal the five-match T20I series against New Zealand in the third game here on Sunday.

With the T20 World Cup barely weeks away, India's core looks settled, but the opening slot alongside Abhishek Sharma remains a live question. Kishan's blistering 76 off just 32 balls in the second T20I has reignited debate, especially with Samson struggling to capitalise on extended opportunities at the top.

Reinstated as opener at the expense of Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill, Samson was backed after a prolific run late last year, including three centuries in five matches. However, back in his preferred role, the Kerala batter has failed to deliver, managing scores of 10 and 6 against New Zealand, both dismissals exposing his discomfort against high pace.

Former India opener WV Raman pointed out Samson's technical inconsistency, noting that his inability to adjust bat speed against varying pace continues to hurt him. Samson's woes were compounded by an untidy moment behind the stumps, conceding four byes off a wide yorker.

In contrast, Kishan grabbed his chance emphatically. Coming in with India reeling at 6/2, the left-hander launched a fearless counter-attack, bringing up a 21-ball fifty and setting the platform for a record chase. His return, after grinding his way back through domestic cricket, underlined both hunger and form.

Skipper Suryakumar Yadav also silenced critics with a scintillating 82 off 37 balls, ending a prolonged lean patch. India chased down 209 in just 15.2 overs, taking a 2-0 series lead despite a rare failure from Abhishek Sharma.

With Jasprit Bumrah expected back and minor injury concerns around Axar Patel, India will aim to fine-tune combinations. For Samson, however, the remaining games may well be a last audition as Kishan's bat continues to do the talking.

*Rachin relishes Indian conditions, fine-tunes T20 game ahead of WC*

# To prepare for these kind of Indian wickets: Rachin Ravindra

**RAIPUR**

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra continues to enjoy batting in Indian conditions and believes his preparations on similar surfaces are beginning to pay off as the T20 World Cup approaches later this year.

The left-hander, who rose to prominence with three centuries during the 2023 ODI World Cup in India, has since gained further familiarity with local conditions through his stint with Chennai Super Kings in the IPL. That experience was on display in the second T20I on Friday night, where he struck a fluent 44 off 26 balls.

Rachin showcased a fine balance of timing and power, driving confidently on the up and launching two sixes each off Harshit Rana and Varun Chakravarthy, before falling to a rare loose delivery from Kuldeep Yadav in the middle overs.

"It is nice to play in India and know the conditions well. Good to have the scoreboard ticking," Rachin said. "I had a lot of training at home, just preparing for these wickets, trying to find my bat swing again with a long diet of T20 cricket ahead."

Heading into the India series, the all-rounder admitted he lacked game time and was pleased to spend meaningful time in the middle. New Zealand posted 208, a total they believed was competitive, but India chased it down comfortably to take a 2-0 lead.

"We thought 208 was par," Rachin said. "The way India batted, it felt like maybe 250 would have been a better target. We lost wickets in clumps, which stalled us a bit."

He acknowledged the impact of dew, a familiar challenge in Indian conditions. "It got progressively wetter, making it harder to grip the ball. That said, it takes nothing away from the way India batted," he added, while crediting Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav for their match-winning knocks.

Despite the setback, Rachin remains optimistic. "We're disappointed to be 2-0 down, but there's a lot of heart in this group. Hopefully, we can put together a more complete performance in the remaining games," he said, confident New Zealand can still fight back in the series.

# Suryakumar showed why he's T20 batter, says Shivam Dube

**RAIPUR**

Shivam Dube had the perfect vantage point as he watched close friend and captain Suryakumar Yadav remind the cricketing world why he is rated the best T20 batter, producing a match-winning knock in India's commanding victory over New Zealand in the second T20I. Suryakumar's fluent 82 off 37 balls was his first fifty-plus score after a lean run of 23 innings, a timely return to form with the T20 World Cup at home just weeks away. The Indian skipper shared an unbroken 81-run partnership with Dube as India chased down a stiff 209-run target with ease.

Batting ahead of Hardik Pandya to maintain a left-right combination, Dube played a brisk supporting role, scoring 36 off just 18 balls. More than the numbers, it was the authority and freedom in Suryakumar's strokeplay that stood out.

"I was asked about Surya's form in a press conference some time ago. I said that when he shows his form, the world will know what kind of player he is," Dube said. "Today, he showed why he is the number one T20 batter. I really enjoyed watching him."

Before the Suryakumar-Dube stand took control, Ishan Kishan had already tilted the contest decisively in India's favour. Making a strong comeback, Kishan smashed 76 off 32 balls, counter-attacking after India slipped to 6/2 early in the chase.

"Ishan is one of the best left-handers I've seen. In the dressing room, we call him a small pocket blast," Dube said. "He has shown what he was doing in domestic cricket."

Dube also contributed with the ball, dismissing the dangerous Daryl Mitchell with a well-disguised slower delivery. The all-rounder credited the backing of the captain and coach for his growing role as a sixth bowling option.

"As a sixth bowler, whatever overs I get, I try to bowl according to the situation," Dube said, underlining India's increasing depth as they build momentum in the series.

**Dube relishes Surya's return to form as India dominate chase against New Zealand**

# Podcast pals Madison Keys, Jessica Pegula set for Australian Open fourth-round clash

**MELBOURNE**

Whatever the outcome of their fourth-round meeting at the Australian Open, Madison Keys has already found the perfect headline for it. The defending champion and fellow American Jessica Pegula — close friends and podcast co-hosts — are set to face each other in what Keys jokingly called a "very niche" moment in Grand Slam history. "This is going to be the first match in Grand Slam history between two podcast co-hosts," Keys said with a smile after advancing on Saturday.

Both players booked their spots with composed straight-set victories. Ninth-seeded Keys opened proceedings on Rod Laver Arena with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Karolina Pliskova, while sixth-seeded Pegula followed with a 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Oksana Selekhmeteva at Margaret Court Arena.

"I think we have to do one before the match," Keys said, confirming that an episode would be filmed ahead of Monday's encounter. "We're going to try to think of something to commemorate this moment."

Asked whether fans could expect any trash talk, Keys laughed it off. "I don't know if either of us trash talks very well," she said. "But we'll definitely find a way to make it entertaining."

Pegula admitted she hadn't initially clocked the possibility of facing her friend until the draw began to unfold. "I didn't really realize it until last round that if we both won, we'd play each other," she said. "Maybe it'll help the numbers on the pod."

As for competitive bragging rights, Keys holds a 2-1 edge in their head-to-head meetings, including a three-set win in last year's Adelaide International final. Friendship aside, both know the stakes are high — a place in the quarterfinals — when podcast pals turn rivals on Melbourne's biggest stage.

# Sinner overcomes cramps, heat to continue Australian Open title defence

**MELBOURNE**

Jannik Sinner survived a severe physical and mental test to keep his Australian Open title defence on track, overcoming American qualifier Eliot Spizzirri in a gruelling third-round encounter on Saturday. Battling oppressive heat and visible cramping in both his arms and legs, the two-time defending champion appeared close to an early exit when he was broken early in the third set.

A crucial turning point came when play was suspended under the tournament's extreme heat policy, allowing the roof on Rod Laver Arena to be closed. The pause gave Sinner much-needed time to recover, and the shift in conditions proved decisive. After play resumed, the second-seeded Italian won five of the next six games to take the third set. A 10-minute cooling break further aided his recovery, and Sinner went on to close out a hard-fought 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 victory. "I struggled physically today. I got lucky with the heat rule," Sinner admitted. "Tennis is a very mental game. I tried to stay calm and fight for every point."

Spizzirri, ranked 85 and playing his first Australian Open main draw, impressed with fearless play and strong crowd support, converting six of 16 break points. He also drew applause for sportsmanship by overturning a time violation against Sinner.

# ICC Replaces Bangladesh with Scotland in Upcoming T20 WC

*Continued from page 1*

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has officially informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) that Scotland will replace Bangladesh in the upcoming T20 World Cup, after the BCB declined to travel to India citing security concerns.

Senior ICC officials, including chairman Jay Shah, were reportedly in Dubai when the decision was finalized. An email was sent to BCB chairman Aminul Islam Bulbul, conveying the global body's decision. "An email was sent last evening to Bangladesh Cricket Board chairman intimating him that his board didn't get back to ICC officially after the 24-hour deadline that was given to them to decide if they wanted to come to India, so a decision has been taken," an ICC source told Media on condition of anonymity. The source added that Bangladesh had held a press conference in Dhaka before formally communicating with the ICC, which violated protocol. "They have been categorically told that they are being replaced," the source said.

Bangladesh's Sports Ministry advisor Asif Nazrul had reportedly advised against travelling to India, citing security concerns, even after repeated assurances from the ICC regarding safety. Cricket Scotland has stated that it has not yet received any official confirmation, though it appears only a matter of time before formal communication is made.

Scotland is now set to play four group-stage games in the tournament. Their schedule includes matches against West Indies on February 7, Italy on February 9, and England on February 14 in Kolkata, followed by a clash with Nepal in Mumbai on February 17.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to begin on February 7, with the tournament now seeing Scotland step in for Bangladesh in what promises to be a tightly contested group stage.

# Replacements in top form, SA well covered for T20 World Cup: Nortje

**JOHANNESBURG**

South Africa pace spearhead Anrich Nortje has played down concerns over injuries in the Proteas camp ahead of the T20 World Cup, expressing confidence in the squad's depth and the form of the replacement players drafted in for the global showpiece.

South Africa were recently forced to make two changes to their 15-man World Cup squad, bringing in Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs after Tony de Zorzi and Donovan Ferreira were ruled out due to injuries. While acknowledging the disappointment of losing key players, Nortje insisted the team remains well covered.

"Obviously, it's sad and unfortunate when guys miss out through injury. I've been on that side myself in a few ICC events," Nortje said. "But the guys coming in have really put their hand up and done well."

The fast bowler pointed out that most replacements have prior international or World Cup experience and are currently performing strongly, particularly in the SA20 League. "These are not players who haven't played at this level. They're proper players and they're in good form," he added.

South Africa are also monitoring the fitness of senior players David Miller, Dewald Brevis and Lungi Ngidi, but Nortje believes the hectic recent schedule has ensured ample match practice for most of the squad.

"There's been a lot of cricket and a lot of travel, but that also means the boys have played plenty of matches. I don't think anyone has gone in undercooked," said the 32-year-old, who has featured in 44 T20Is for the Proteas.

Addressing concerns over slow pitches, including at the Wanderers, Nortje said variety in conditions is nothing new for South African teams. "Every venue here offers something different. The important thing is adapting quickly, and I think we've done that well," he said.

While admitting that an international series together before the World Cup would have been ideal, Nortje felt the squad is close to peak readiness. "Everyone looks confident and in good space. It's probably as close to ideal as it can be."

Highlighting the unpredictability of T20 cricket, Nortje added that South Africa would rely on collective effort rather than individuals as they head into the World Cup.

# FIFA to award $2.3 million to winners of inaugural Women's Champions Cup

## FIFA unveils prize money boost as women's club football takes landmark step

**ZURICH**

FIFA will award $2.3 million in prize money to the winners of the inaugural Women's Champions Cup, marking a significant financial milestone for the women's club game ahead of the tournament's final stages in England next week.

The world governing body confirmed that a total prize fund of $3.9 million will be shared among the six continental champions competing in the event. The Women's Champions Cup is being staged as a precursor to a full-scale Women's Club World Cup, which FIFA plans to launch in 2028.

The semi-finals will be held on Wednesday, January 28, at the home of Premier League club Brentford. European champions Arsenal will face Morocco's ASFAR, while Gotham FC of the United States take on Brazil's Corinthians.

The final and third-place playoff are scheduled for February 1 at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium.

Under FIFA's prize distribution model, the tournament winners will receive $2.3 million, while the runners-up will take home $1 million. The two losing semi-finalists will each earn $200,000. Continental champions already eliminated earlier — Auckland United of Oceania and Wuhan Chegu Jiangda of Asia — will each receive $100,000.

"The prize money is a clear statement of the belief in women's club football and the players, teams and competitions driving its continued rise," FIFA secretary general Mattias Grafström said in a statement.

The figures underline FIFA's intent to narrow the financial gap between the men's and women's games, though a stark disparity remains. FIFA distributed $1 billion among the 32 teams at the men's Club World Cup in 2025, a tournament staged in the United States and backed heavily by Saudi Arabian investment to attract top European clubs.

By comparison, Arsenal earned just over €1.5 million ($1.8 million) for winning the UEFA Women's Champions League last season.

FIFA hopes the Women's Champions Cup will raise the profile of elite women's clubs globally, build commercial momentum and serve as a testing ground ahead of the expanded Women's Club World Cup, which is expected to significantly increase participation, visibility and prize money when it debuts later this decade.

# Consider WC boycott over Trump's actions, says German official

**German FA vice-president urges debate on values as 2026 World Cup approaches**

**BERLIN**

A senior German football official has called for serious discussions on a potential boycott of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, citing concerns over the political actions of U.S. President Donald Trump and their broader implications for global stability and values.

Oke Göttlich, president of Bundesliga club St. Pauli and one of the German Football Federation's (DFB) 10 vice-presidents, said the issue could no longer be ignored. Göttlich argued that "the time has come" to consider whether participation in the World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, aligns with football's stated principles.

Trump's controversial foreign policy moves — including a takeover bid for Greenland and threats of tariffs against several European nations — have unsettled relations between the United States and its allies, raising fears of long-term geopolitical fallout. Göttlich compared the current situation to the Olympic boycotts of the 1980s.

"What were the justifications for those boycotts?" he asked. "By my reckoning, the potential threat is greater now than it was then. We need to have this discussion."

The United States will host matches from June 11 to July 19, but concerns are already mounting among fans over high ticket prices and travel bans that could prevent supporters from certain nations from attending.

Göttlich's stance is likely to face resistance from DFB president Bernd Neuendorf and FIFA president Gianni Infantino, both of whom have so far resisted calls to politicise the tournament. Göttlich questioned what he sees as inconsistency in football's moral positioning.

"Qatar was too political for everyone and now we're suddenly apolitical?" he said. "That really bothers me."

Known for its strong political identity, St. Pauli has long blended sport with activism. Göttlich dismissed suggestions that a boycott would unfairly punish players, arguing that football cannot turn a blind eye to wider human consequences.

"The life of a professional footballer is not worth more than the lives of countless people being threatened or harmed," he said. "As organisations and as a society, we must remember how to set boundaries and defend values." His remarks ensure the debate over politics and sport will intensify as the 2026 World Cup draws closer.

*Michael Carrick urges Manchester United to prove credentials as Arsenal await test*

# Carrick challenges Man Utd as Arsenal await, Arteta warns of lethal counters

**LONDON**

Michael Carrick has challenged Manchester United to prove their credentials against Premier League leaders Arsenal as the interim head coach prepares for his second game in charge, while Mikel Arteta has warned his side to be wary of United's "lethal" counter-attacking threat.

Carrick enjoyed a dream start to his spell at Old Trafford with a commanding 2-0 derby win, a performance that lifted mood and belief around the club. Now comes a far sterner examination at the Emirates Stadium, where Arsenal remain unbeaten this season and are firmly on course to end their long wait for a league title.

United have not won a Premier League game away to Arsenal since 2017, but Carrick believes the challenge is one his players should embrace. He praised Arteta's side as a "rounded team" with threats across the pitch, highlighting their dangerous wide players, strong set-pieces and collective balance between attack and defence.

"We know it's a challenge, but it's one we can face head-on," Carrick said, insisting his squad must keep proving itself week by week after an encouraging start under his guidance.

Arteta, meanwhile, expects United to arrive with renewed intensity and ideas under Carrick. The Arsenal manager pointed to the Manchester derby as evidence of United's ability to punish opponents ruthlessly on the break, stressing the need for control and concentration.

# Williams to miss opening F1 preseason test after car delays

**GROVE**

Williams will miss next week's opening Formula 1 preseason test in Barcelona after reporting delays in getting its new car ready for the 2026 season, the team confirmed.

The Barcelona shakedown, scheduled to run over five days, will be the first opportunity for teams to put 2026-specification cars through extended running, beyond limited filming and reliability sessions. Williams, however, said it has opted to withdraw as it continues work on its FW48 challenger in pursuit of improved performance.

"Atlassian Williams F1 Team has taken the decision not to participate in next week's shakedown test in Barcelona following delays in the FW48 program as we continue to push for maximum car performance," the team said in a statement.

Instead, Williams plans to conduct a virtual testing programme next week and will now target the first of two official preseason tests in Bahrain next month. The Barcelona test is being held privately, with teams allowed to run on any three of the five days, and is primarily focused on reliability rather than outright pace.

Despite the setback, Williams struck an optimistic tone. "We are looking forward to getting on track in the coming weeks and want to thank all our fans for your continued support – there is a lot to look forward to together in 2026," the statement added.

The delay is a blow for a team that showed clear signs of progress during the 2025 season, highlighted by two podium finishes for Carlos Sainz Jr. Williams had been among the most transparent teams about shifting resources early toward the sweeping 2026 regulation changes, viewing them as an opportunity to close the gap to the front of the grid.

Inter recover from early shock to rout Pisa, tightening grip atop Serie A

## Inter Milan Bounce Back From 2-0 Down, Demolish Pisa To Extend Serie A Lead

**MILAN**

Inter Milan produced a blistering comeback to thrash struggling Pisa 6-2, recovering from a two-goal deficit to strengthen their position at the top of Serie A and open a six-point lead over rivals AC Milan. What briefly threatened to become one of the shock results of the season instead turned into a ruthless display of attacking depth and resilience at the San Siro. Pisa, winless in their previous 10 league matches, stunned the home crowd by racing into a 2-0 lead midway through the first half.

The visitors struck after 11 minutes when veteran striker Stefano Moreo capitalised on a poor pass from Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer. Spotting Sommer off his line, Moreo lifted an audacious shot from around 35 metres into the empty net. Pisa doubled their advantage in the 23rd minute as Stefano headed home from a corner, leaving Inter suddenly rattled.

However, the league leaders responded emphatically. Piotr Zielinski pulled one back from the penalty spot seven minutes before halftime after Matteo Tramoni was penalised for handball. Momentum swung decisively moments later when captain Lautaro Martínez rose to nod in the equaliser.

Inter completed a stunning turnaround just before the break as Francesco Pio Esposito headed home Alessandro Bastoni's cross, giving the hosts a 3-2 lead at halftime after three goals in seven minutes.

The second half became a procession. Federico Dimarco made it 4-2 with eight minutes remaining, before Ange-Yoan Bonny added a fifth following an impressive solo run. Henrikh Mkhitaryan capped the scoring deep into stoppage time with Inter's sixth.

The victory marked Inter's ninth win in 10 league games and moved them six points clear of AC Milan and nine ahead of defending champions Napoli. The timing was ideal, with the top four facing each other this weekend, potentially further reshaping the title race.

# Bradley Barcola's Late Winner Sinks Auxerre, Sends PSG Top of Ligue 1

**AUXERRE**

Bradley Barcola's deft late finish earned Paris Saint-Germain a hard-fought 1-0 victory away to Auxerre, sending the defending champions back to the top of Ligue 1, at least temporarily.

The 23-year-old winger, PSG's most persistent attacking threat throughout the match, finally broke Auxerre's resistance 10 minutes from time with a delicate chipped effort that settled a contest dominated by the visitors. Until then, it had appeared Auxerre might hold PSG to a second successive goalless home draw, inspired largely by an outstanding performance from goalkeeper Donovan Leon.

The win lifted PSG above Lens in the standings, though Lens could reclaim first place with a victory away to third-placed Marseille on Saturday. Auxerre, meanwhile, remain entrenched in the relegation zone, six points adrift of safety.

PSG began at a blistering pace and could have been out of sight inside the opening 10 minutes. Barcola was twice denied by Leon, while Sinaly Diomande produced a crucial sliding block to stop Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's goalbound effort. Leon continued to frustrate the visitors, parrying a close-range header from Goncalo Ramos and later producing a superb double save in a frantic goalmouth scramble to deny both Kvaratskhelia and teenage prospect Ibrahim Mbaye.

After the break, the pattern remained unchanged. Barcola flashed a shot wide, Kvaratskhelia saw a deflected effort drift just past the post, and Barcola's attempted chip dropped agonisingly onto the roof of the net. Auxerre offered little going forward, with speculative efforts from Danny Namaso and Lassine Sinayoko failing to test PSG goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier.

# Ferrari 'More United Than Ever' as Hamilton Drives New F1 Car after Troubled 2025

**FIORANO MODENESE**

Ferrari team principal Fred Vasseur insisted the Scuderia is "more united than ever" after Lewis Hamilton took the wheel of the team's new Formula 1 car, the SF-26, during its first shakedown run.

Hamilton drove the car at Ferrari's private Fiorano test track on a cool, damp winter's morning, marking the Italian team's first on-track outing ahead of official preseason testing in Spain next week. The brief run was designed to check systems and reliability before the start of full testing under Formula 1's radically revised 2026 regulations.

The sweeping rule changes — among the most significant in the sport's history — have raised hopes Ferrari can move on from a frustrating 2025 campaign. Last season proved difficult for both Hamilton and Charles Leclerc, with Ferrari failing to win a single Grand Prix. For Hamilton, it was an especially challenging debut year with the team, as the seven-time world champion did not reach the podium in a Grand Prix for the first time in his career, though he did secure a sprint race victory.

"This car is the result of a tremendous team effort and represents the start of a completely new journey," Vasseur said. "It is built around a different set of rules that inevitably brings a number of unknowns. The team is aligned and more united than ever as we look ahead to the season."

Ferrari's struggles last year had sparked speculation over Vasseur's future, but the Frenchman received a contract extension in July, backed strongly by senior management. Hamilton described the development of the SF-26 as a "particularly fascinating challenge," with the new regulations mandating smaller and lighter cars, and a greater emphasis on electrical power.

"The 2026 season represents a huge challenge for everyone, probably the biggest regulation change I have experienced in my career," Hamilton said. "When a new era begins, everything revolves around development, growth as a team, and moving forward in the same direction." The new Formula 1 season begins with the Australian Grand Prix on March 8.

# Tushar Mane and Sakshi Better Record Scores in Selection Trials

**NEW DELHI**

Maharashtra's Sakshi Sunil Padekar and Railways' Shahu Tushar Mane delivered standout performances at the National Selection Trials 1 & 2, bettering national record scores in the women's and men's 10m air rifle events at the Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Sakshi produced a sensational display in the women's event, shooting 254.3 in the Trial 2 final after topping qualification with 634.4. Her final score surpassed the existing national record set by Elavenil Valarivan at last year's Asian Shooting Championship. Mane, meanwhile, impressed in the men's competition by firing 637.1 in the qualification round. However, according to the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), these performances will not be recognised as official national records as they were achieved during trials.

After a below-par outing on Thursday, Olympian Arjun Babuta bounced back strongly to win the men's 10m air rifle Trial 2 final. Babuta, who had qualified second with 632.4, raised his level in the final to finish with 253.4, edging out Maharashtra's Parth Rakesh Mane by a slender margin of 0.1 points. Parth finished on 253.3, while Kiran Ankush Jadav claimed third place.

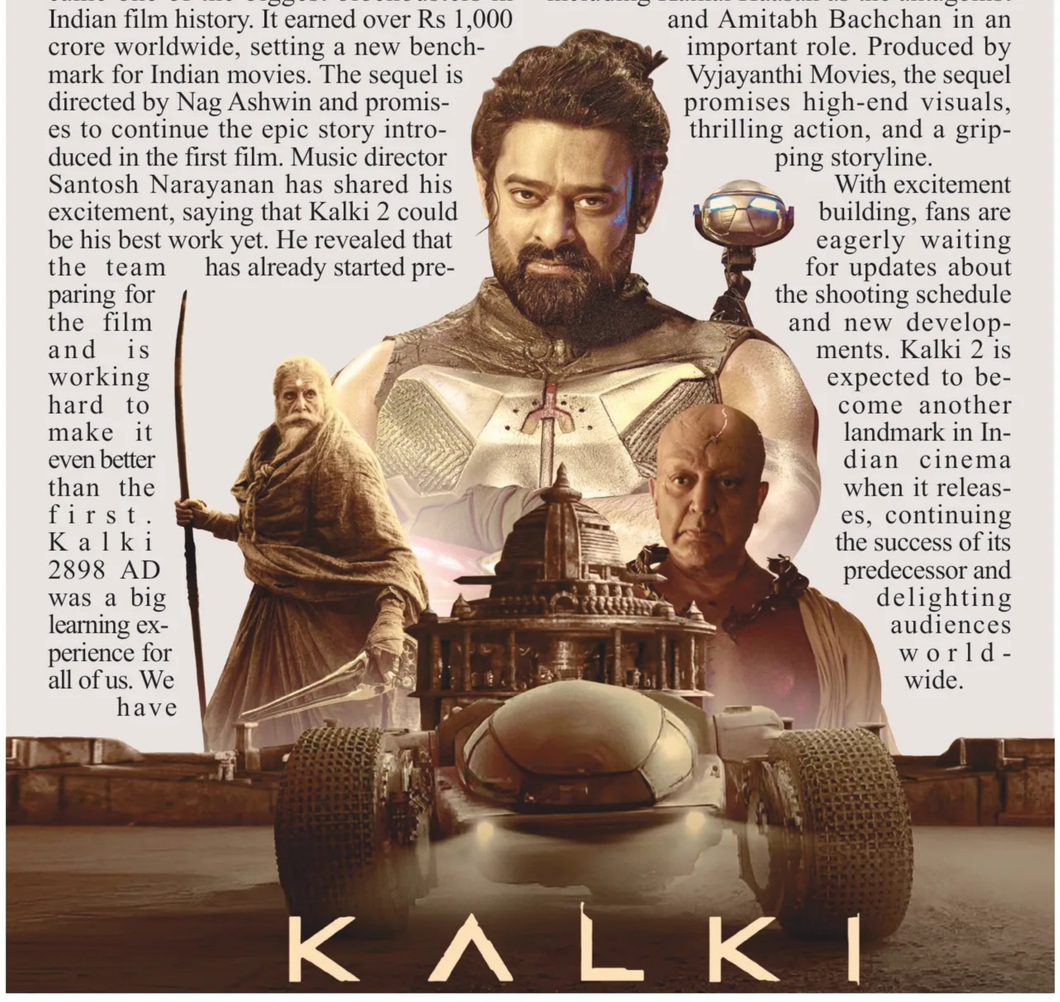
Sakshi was in complete command of the women's 10m air rifle event, maintaining control from qualification through to the final to clinch top honours.

# Prabhas' 'Kalki 2' Sequel Shooting Starts February Next Year

Fans of Indian cinema have a reason to celebrate as the highly anticipated sequel, Kalki 2, is set to go on floors in February. The first film, Kalki 2898 AD, starring Prabhas, was a massive hit and became one of the biggest blockbusters in Indian film history. It earned over Rs 1,000 crore worldwide, setting a new benchmark for Indian movies. The sequel is directed by Nag Ashwin and promises to continue the epic story introduced in the first film. Music director Santosh Narayanan has shared his excitement, saying that Kalki 2 could be his best work yet. He revealed that the team has already started preparing for the film and is working hard to make it even better than the first. Kalki 2898 AD was a big learning experience for all of us. We have started work on Kalki Part 2, and once dates are set, shooting will begin. I hope this becomes my best work, Narayanan said in a recent interview.

The film will bring back popular actors, including Kamal Haasan as the antagonist and Amitabh Bachchan in an important role. Produced by Vyjayanthi Movies, the sequel promises high-end visuals, thrilling action, and a gripping storyline.

With excitement building, fans are eagerly waiting for updates about the shooting schedule and new developments. Kalki 2 is expected to become another landmark in Indian cinema when it releases, continuing the success of its predecessor and delighting audiences worldwide.




# Hudson Williams, Connor Storrie Named 2026 Olympics Torchbearers

Actors Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie, known for their roles in the queer hockey drama Heated Rivalry, have been chosen as torchbearers for the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

The Olympic Torch Relay is a special tradition, carrying the Olympic flame across cities and countries before the Games' opening ceremony. Williams and Storrie, who play rival hockey players in Heated Rivalry, have won praise for their performances and chemistry on screen. The series, based on Rachel Reid's books, tells the story of two professional players whose rivalry slowly turns into a deep relationship over several years. The show premiered on November 28 last year and streams on Crave in Canada and HBO Max in the U.S.

Recently, both actors have been in the public eye beyond the show. Hudson Williams walked the runway at Milan Fashion Week for Dsquared2, while Connor Storrie appeared on popular U.S. shows, including Late Night with Seth Meyers and Today.

Heated Rivalry has already been renewed for a second season, which HBO Max will stream. Author Rachel Reid also announced a new book, Unrivaled, that will continue the story of Shane and Ilya, the characters played by Williams and Storrie. With their growing popularity and now this Olympic honor, Hudson Williams and Connor Storrie are set to inspire fans both on and off the screen, blending sports, art, and storytelling in a unique way.

# *Bhagyashree Shares Heartfelt Birthday Message For Daughter Avantika*

Bollywood actress Bhagyashree recently took to social media to wish her daughter, Avantika Dassani, a happy birthday in a touching note that reflected their close bond. Calling Avantika her breath and sunshine, Bhagyashree shared how her life changed the moment she held her daughter for the first time.

Along with her heartfelt message, Bhagyashree posted several photos showing the mother-daughter duo. One picture features them in traditional saris, smiling as Avantika affectionately leans on her mother. Another throwback image captures Avantika's childhood, highlighting her innocence and charm.

In her note, Bhagyashree wrote, From the time that I held you in my arms, I knew my world had changed. That piece of my heart that lived outside of me but forever will be mine. You were my child, but you mothered me, sometimes cradled me as I did too. She added, You are my breath, my sunshine, my oxytocin… and I can never have enough of you. I love you my honeybun, my chipmunk, my tomboy, my beautiful doll, my warrior, my friend n daughter all rolled into one.

# Ajith Kumar Fans Celebrate Mankatha Re-release With Fervor

Ajith Kumar's cult classic Mankatha has returned to cinemas, 13 years after its original release, and fans are celebrating with full enthusiasm. The re-release has drawn crowds across Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with audiences cheering, whistling, clapping, and even showering confetti during screenings.

One screening at Karpagam Theatre in Coimbatore, however, saw a fan burst crackers inside the hall during Ajith's introduction scene. Police reportedly entered the theatre to control the crowd, ensuring safety while fans continued their celebrations.

The film's enduring appeal lies in Ajith Kumar's memorable portrayal of anti-hero Vinayak Mahadev. Playing a corrupt Mumbai ACP with shades of grey, Ajith's salt and pepper look became a trend among fans. His intense face-offs with Action King Arjun added thrill to the story and kept audiences on the edge of their seats.

Mankatha's plot revolves around Vinayak, who is suspended for helping a smuggler infiltrate a gang planning to steal Rs 500 crore in IPL betting money from gangster Chettiyar. Vinayak collaborates with four thieves—Sumanth (Vaibhav), Prem (Premji Amaran), Mahat (Mahat Raghavendra), and Ganesh (Ashwin Kakumanu)—while secretly planning to betray them and claim the loot for himself. Betrayals escalate with police pursuits, kidnappings, murders, and a dramatic finale fueled by greed.

The film's soundtrack and Yuvan Shankar Raja's background score continue to be praised for amplifying the tension and excitement. Even after more than a decade, Mankatha's thrilling story and Ajith's performance make it a cinematic experience that fans eagerly relive on the big screen.

# Salman Khan's 'Maatrubhumi' Song From Battle Of Galwan

The much-awaited war film Battle of Galwan, starring Salman Khan and Chitrangada, has released its powerful anthem, Maatrubhumi, ahead of its Republic Day 2026 premiere. The song celebrates the courage and sacrifice of soldiers while showing tender family moments.

Salman Khan plays Colonel Bikkumalla Santosh Babu, a brave officer serving the nation. The music video shows two sides of his character – his dedication to duty and his love for his family, including his wife, played by Chitrangada, and their two sons. Fans were particularly moved by these personal moments, highlighting the emotional depth of the story.

The song's lyrics emphasize devotion to the motherland, with lines such as, Maatrubhumi aaj mai sankalp lu tere liye, mai jiyoon tere liye aur mai marun tere liye (Motherland, today I take a pledge for you, I will live for you and I will die for you). Composed by Himesh Reshammiya, the song features the voices of Arijit Singh and Shreya Ghoshal, adding to its stirring effect.

Upon its release, fans praised the combination of Salman Khan and Arijit Singh. Many shared their excitement online, with comments like Tiger is ready and even viewers from other countries saying the song gave them goosebumps. Heart and salute emojis flooded the comment section as fans expressed respect for the soldiers and admiration for the film.

Battle of Galwan is based on the real 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese forces in the Galwan Valley, honoring the bravery of 200 Indian soldiers defending their territory. The song Maatrubhumi sets the tone for a film that blends heroism, patriotism, and emotional storytelling.

# Top Tamil Directors Move To Tollywood For Bigger Projects

Telugu cinema is attracting top Tamil directors as they seek bigger budgets, wider reach, and better pay. Directors like Atlee and Lokesh Kanagaraj have upcoming films with Allu Arjun, while Nelson Dilipkumar is reportedly in talks to work with Jr NTR. Industry insiders explain why this creative migration is gaining momentum.

Producer G Dhananjheyan says the trend is not unusual. Filmmakers want to be treated as pan-Indian directors, not limited to Tamil cinema. Opportunities exist across India, in Telugu, Kannada, and Hindi films. Many directors, including Prabhudeva, AR Murugadoss, Atlee, and RS Prasanna, have succeeded in multiple industries, he explains.

Economics also play a key role. Tamil producers often cannot afford the high salaries some directors command, while Telugu production houses can fund films with budgets of ₹500-750 crore. Except for a few production houses, no Tamil producer can pay a ₹50 crore salary to a director. Telugu cinema offers bigger projects and higher pay, a source revealed. Another factor is the limited pool of Tamil actors who can anchor mega-budget films. If Vijay had continued acting, a ₹400-500 crore film would be possible. In Tamil, only Rajinikanth can carry such projects, while Telugu stars like Allu Arjun and Prabhas have pan-Indian appeal, adds Dhananjheyan. Producer Sameer Bharat Ram stresses that filmmakers should have professional freedom.

Directors can work in any industry with any actors. Their choice should not be questioned. With larger budgets, wider reach, and pan-Indian opportunities, Tamil directors are increasingly turning to Tollywood, signaling a shift in the Indian film industry landscape.

# Prabhas film producer files impersonation complaint

Following the release of The Raja Saab, producer SKN has filed a police complaint against several social media accounts impersonating him and posting derogatory and misleading content about the film and its cast. The complaint was lodged at the Cyber Crime Police Station, and an investigation is currently underway. Directed by Maruthi, the Prabhas-starrer released on January 9 and earned around Rs 200 crore worldwide, despite receiving mixed reviews. According to SKN, the fake posts created confusion and unfairly targeted the film and its actors. He warned that strict legal action will be taken against those responsible for spreading negativity.

# Roshan Meka's Champion To Stream On Netflix Soon

Roshan Meka's latest film Champion is set to arrive on Netflix from January 29, just five weeks after its theatrical release. The early digital debut follows the movie's lukewarm performance at the box office and aims to reach a wider audience quickly.

Champion, a period sports drama directed by Pradeep Advaitam, tells the story of Michael B Williams, a talented footballer from Secunderabad who dreams of playing for Manchester in England. His journey is full of challenges, including being entangled in arms smuggling and facing Razakar atrocities in Bhairanpally village. Along the way, he falls in love with Chandrakala, played by Anaswara Rajan. Avantika Vandanapu and Edward Sonnenblick also appear in key roles.

The movie released in theatres on December 25 and received mixed reviews. While some praised its story and performances, weak word-of-mouth and limited audience turnout affected its box office collection. Industry insiders believe that the OTT release on Netflix is a strategic move to reduce losses and expand viewership.

Netflix will stream Champion in multiple languages, including Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam, making it accessible to a pan-Indian audience.

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